THE MYSTICAL LIFE

DOM S. LOUISMET O.S.B.

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The Mystical Life

By Dom S. Louismet, O.S.B.

Author of several works on Mysticism

FOURTH AND REVISED EDITION

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LOVE AND THE CHILD.

'Why do you so clasp me,
And draw me to your knee?
Forsooth, you do but chafe me.
I pray you let me be:
I will be loved but now and then:
When it liketh me!'

So I heard a young child,
A thwart child, a young child
Rebellious against love's arms,
Make its peevish cry.

To the tender God I turn:—
'Pardon, Love most High!
For I think those arms were even Thine,
And that child was even I.'

FRANCIS THOMPSON.
(*By permission.*)

PREFACE

THE subject of Mysticism, whatever one may understand by the word itself, is now amazingly popular. Its literature is immense, and is varied bewilderingly, confusion becoming greater almost day by day. So much so, that for anyone wishing to contribute his own share to the general discussion, it is necessary, at the very outset, to define his position.

The mysticism I speak of in the following pages is Catholic Mysticism. Not any sort of Catholic or would-be-Catholic Mysticism: but Catholic Traditional Mysticism.

Two questions will arise at once in the minds of some readers: Is there a Catholic Traditional Mysticism? and if so, in what does it differ from any other mysticism? For with many people the conviction prevails, and is strongly rooted, that mysticism is a relatively modern discovery, and was quite unknown to the mediæval Doctors, to the Fathers of the Church or to the Christians of the first centuries.

Well, there is indeed a Catholic Traditional Mysticism, and it is purely and simply the mysticism of our Holy Mother the Church, who is the Bride of Christ and the teacher and infallible oracle of truth. And although all the chapters of the present volume, nay, all the other volumes that may follow are, or will be, written for the very purpose of giving a complete sketch of this Catholic Traditional Mysti-

cism; yet it behoves us to present here in a few words, a preliminary description of what we mean thereby.

By Catholic Traditional Mysticism I mean the mysticism with which the Epistles of St. Paul, of St. John, and the other Canonical Epistles, as well as all the other Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testaments (but more particularly the divine Gospels), are overflowing. It is the mysticism of the everlasting Sacrifice of the Lamb on the Cross and on our altars, and of the whole sacred Liturgy around it; the mysticism of the Missal, of the Ritual, of the Pontifical, of the Ceremonial of Bishops, of the Breviary, of the Martyrology, of the *Catechismus Concilii Tridentini*, as well as of the simple Catechism.

Catholic Traditional Mysticism is the mysticism of the Apostles, of the first Christians, of the Holy Martyrs and Confessors of all ages, whatever their profession, who have glorified God and sanctified themselves in this world. It is the mysticism of all men of good will: Catholic not only in name, or because it is sanctioned by the authority of the Catholic Church, but Catholic also in that it embraces all things and all persons that are Christ's. *All things are yours,* says St. Paul, *and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's* (1 Cor. iii, 22, 23).

Again, what is to be understood by mysticism in itself? Is it a body of doctrine? or a set of rules for our moral conduct? or (to use the barbarous jargon of the day) a set of extraordinary psychic phenomena? or is it a

special revelation given to some favoured souls over and above the official revelation contained in the *depositum fidei*? Nothing of the kind.

Mysticism is an experience.

Mysticism is a soul-experience.

Mysticism—Catholic Traditional Mysticism—the only mysticism which deserves the name, the mysticism which is in question in these pages, is simply and solely the special soul-experience of a human being, as yet a wayfarer on earth, actually tasting and seeing that God is sweet. *O taste and see that God is sweet*, exclaimed the Psalmist (Ps. xxxiii, 9), and St. Peter thus exhorts the Christians of his day: *As newborn babes, desire the rational milk without guile, that thereby you may grow unto salvation;* adding: *If so be you have tasted that the Lord is sweet* (1 Pet. ii, 2, 3).

It is true that from the beginning of Christianity until within very recent times, no mention was ever made in Catholic literature of a special class of men called "mystics" in the modern acceptation of the word; but from century to century we hear now and again of "Mystical Theology."

This term, introduced into the Christian vocabulary by the pseudo-Areopagite, is taken up at distant intervals by pious writers until at last it is fitly enshrined in the immortal treatise on the Love of God, by St. Francis of Sales (Book V, ch. ii, and Book VI, ch. i); and throughout, Mystical Theology is invariably taken, purely and simply, as meaning the soul-experience I have mentioned.

If such a universal writer as St. Thomas Aquinas does not speak of mystics as a peculiar class, is it not because, for him as for the Areopagite, all Christians are *de jure* mystics? And if he did not know of that vague, undetermined, and Proteus-like thing, which in modern language is called mysticism, was it not because for him such a thing did not exist? And if he never mentioned a separate body of mystical doctrine, was it not because for him there is no mystical doctrine distinct from the common deposit of faith? As for Mystical Theology considered as a soul-experience, there can be found no better scientific exponent of it than the Angel of the Schools himself. We shall have more than one occasion to point this out as we proceed.

We must never lose sight of the fact that the smallest prayer, the smallest act of religion, if performed in the right spirit, is a mystical act; the act namely of a human soul, reaching out to God unseen. In this act there is the united co-operation of the loving God and of the loving soul. In the act of prayer the Christian is not alone, is not left to himself, God is with him, since it is of faith that without the supernatural help of the prevenient grace of God, no one can so much as pronounce devoutly the name of Jesus. *No man can say, The Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost* (1 Cor. xii, 3). Could anything more mystical, more secret and interior, more transcending and potent be imagined, than what takes place when a pilgrim of the earth, man, woman. or little child prays? Thus, all the

acts of religion, whatever form they take, if only they are done in the proper spirit, are acts of mysticism, of the purest and highest mysticism. I wonder what a contemporary means by talking of the "mystical element" in religion, as though the whole of religion was not mystical, absolutely and purely mystical.

As for the distinction between what is called "Speculative Mysticism" and "Practical Mysticism," we may neglect it altogether; Real Mysticism is all practical. There is no other speculative mysticism than the scientific presentment of Divine Revelation in Dogmatic and Moral Theology, and there is no reason for calling it by any other name than the consecrated one of Dogmatic and Moral Theology. For, if Speculative Mysticism means anything different from the doctrine of Divine Revelation, then it must be rejected.

Modern writers have a great deal to say about what they call "the mystical faculty." Truth to tell, there are two mystical faculties; and they are no other than the intellect and the free-will of the Christian, informed by faith, hope and charity and the infused moral virtues, and strengthened moreover by the Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost. These are the mystical faculties: there are no others.

Genius, coupled with a reverent turn of mind, in the arts of romance, music, poetry, painting, commands our admiration, but I would not assign genius or its successful exercise to any extra-faculty. All these proceed from the intellect and free will, helped on by a vivid imagination

and by a skill of hand which is the fruit of hard work and well disciplined sensibility. Unless the element of sincere, supernatural religion be added to these, nothing mystical is there; only a proof of what we might call, modifying slightly a celebrated sentence of Tertullian, "testimonium animæ naturaliter mysticæ;" i.e., "the evidence that the human soul has a natural disposition to mysticism." The Saints are the great artists. Their masterpieces, their great works of art, are their own beautiful, pure lives, the active share they take in the secret of their own hearts, in the sanctity and the joy of God.

The experiences of mystical life, for one who abandons himself perfectly to the action of God, and faithfully co-operates with it, are as numerous and as varied as the experiences of physical life. They may not be more particularly noticed than these. For the most part, unless something special happens to call one's attention to them, physical experiences take place unnoticed and unperceived, flowing in a stream which bears one steadily onward So is it with the spiritual experiences of the mystic: they embrace his whole life and permeate even its minutest details, bearing him swiftly towards the eternal goal. They begin in the early morning as soon as he awakens from sleep and gives his heart to God, and they go on without intermittence, the whole day long: hardly can they be said to cease at night. *I sleep*, says the bride of the Canticle, *and my heart watcheth* (Cant. v, 2). Yes, the life of the mystic is one steady

flow of spiritual experiences of which some are intensely delightful, others less so, some painful and even terrible, or simply trying to patience. But all are touched with the light of God, all tend to enable the mystic to die more and more to self, and to live to God, aflame with His love.

The genuine Christian life, lived in its fulness, according to each one's vocation and state, is the true Higher Life. Therein the loving soul meets the loving God. Therein man transcends the whole created order of things visible and invisible, to such an extent as even to meet God, to grapple with Him in the dark, and to wrest from Him, if not His name, which is ineffable, certainly, at any rate, His blessing.

There are two kinds of mystics: the dumb ones and the eloquent ones; eloquent, these last, with tongue or the pen, or with both. *My heart hath uttered a good word,* sings the Psalmist; *my tongue* is *the pen of a scrivener that writeth swiftly* (Ps. xliv, 2). These are the only true "mystical writers." The appellation must not be given indiscriminately to all who take upon themselves the task of informing the world at large what they understand by mysticism. Oh, no! Otherwise a deist, like the philosopher Boutroux, would have to be considered a mystical writer, and many others even less deserving of the title. Thus, to preclude the possibility of hopeless confusion and misunderstanding, we shall reserve the name of "mystical writers" for those only who speak of the soul-experience of Mystical Theology, and who are qualified to do so because they have themselves enjoyed

it and are familiar with its manifestations. Such are, for instance, beside the authors already quoted in previous paragraphs, St. Gertrude, Ruysbroeck, Blessed Suso, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Angela of Foligno, St. Teresa.

From the writings of such as these there goes forth a virtue entirely lacking in the writings of other men, be they ever so talented. These give us glimpses, as it were, of Mystical Theology, make us understand its meaning and long for its enjoyment; they even dispose the soul for it and give her a foretaste of its ineffable delights. These are the only authentic "mystical writers." The others are unmystical even when, perchance, they do write about genuine mysticism, which is seldom the case. Even then their writings have a blighting influence, because they lack the unction of the Holy Spirit, and are the outcome of mere human effort and mere external study of the subject matter of mysticism; too philosophical, too much of the brain and appealing only to the brain, too dry-as-dust. But, I repeat, it is seldom indeed that they confine themselves to genuine mysticism and do not stray into blind alleys leading nowhere, or into by-paths that lose themselves in a tangled wilderness of metaphysical nonsense. These writers have done an enormous amount of mischief. It has been said that in paganism everything was God, except God Himself; it may be said that in our days everything is called mysticism except mysticism itself.

Is it not high time that a halt should be called upon this road to destruction? Such loose and

indiscriminate use of the word mysticism, even among Catholic writers, is in my opinion responsible, not only for much of the present confusion of thought on the subject, but, as an inevitable consequence (though it may not be apparent at first sight), for much of the present slackness in the pursuit of Christian perfection. *Save me, O Lord,* exclaims David, *for there is now no Saint;* and the reason he assigns is this: *truths are decayed from among the children of men. They have spoken vain things every one to his neighbour* (Ps. xi, 2, 3).

When I had collected the greater part of my material for this work and made up my mind as to its definite plan, it was my good fortune to meet with the late Bishop Hedley of Newport. I mentioned to him my intention of publishing something on mysticism. The first reply of the great man was not encouraging. He dryly remarked: "There is too much already written on the subject." This thunderbolt from such a quarter came very near to shattering my strongest purpose.

All I could stammer at first in reply was: "Yes, indeed, there has been too much written on the subject." Alas! who knew this better, forced as he had been to face the inconceivable mass of modern bibliography about mysticism: books of all sizes and articles in Reviews hailing from all the quarters of the world, and from the four winds of human speculation? "But," I added, "if you will kindly listen to me, you will see that I aim at nothing less than putting a stop to the flow of writings which are to no

purpose. My ambition is to turn men's minds and wills to *practising* mystical life instead of writing so much about it."

Then the venerable prelate became interested, and when he had heard me to the end, he turned to me with a very benevolent and smiling face, and said with an emphasis which precluded all idea of mere compliment: "Ah! now I understand. Well, it is a noble and arduous undertaking; but, write your book, and when completed, send it to me: I promise you I will do my best to make it known and read." Here was no small encouragement. I treasured in my heart those kind words of a Bishop, who, more forcibly than any one I had ever met, put me in mind of the ancient Fathers of the Church. Alas! death has robbed me of the prospect of his assistance, unless he grant it me from on high.

Just as in *The Mystical Knowledge of God*, I aim in this new book at being eminently practical and doing as much good to the largest number as possible. I am writing not only for the learned, but also for the simple and the ignorant, and I have confidence that both the learned and the ignorant will find something to help them in these pages.

Certainly this is no academic presentment of the subject of mysticism. No attempt has been made at rhetorical or oratorical display. Hyperbolical expressions have been wholly discarded. Everything in these pages may be and must be taken quite literally. Nay, startling as some statements may appear to the uninitiated, these

must be considered as a weak presentment—a very weak one indeed—of the splendid marvellous realities. We have to bear in mind that human language is a poor instrument, wholly inadequate when used for the purpose of expressing divine mysteries.

The object of this work being mainly to state the traditional notion of the mystical life, to formulate it accurately, to set it in its proper light and let it speak for itself, the reader will understand why I have refrained from controversy. It has seemed to me that in the very harmony of the development of this doctrine, in its balance, and in its comprehensive unity, there is a sort of persuasiveness not to be resisted.

And although, I truly believe, there is not in this work one single proposition which I could not vindicate with the united testimony of an imposing array of the best authorities ancient and modern on the subject, yet I have refrained as a rule from multiplying quotations, for fear of swelling my volume to unwieldy dimensions.

I submit all I have written and may write hereafter to the judgment of our Holy Mother the Church, ready to retract anything that would not meet with her approval. I am ready also to defer to the better judgment of any of my brethren, especially to those of the holy priesthood, who might point out any mistake to me; for I hold that after sin, there is no greater misfortune than that of falling, however involuntarily, into the slightest dogmatic error.

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CHAPTER I

DESCRIPTION OF THE MYSTICAL LIFE

MYSTICAL life is life with God. In the words of Bishop Waffelaert of Bruges, in his short treatise *La Mystique et la Perfection Chrétienne*, mystical life is "a life of intimate, sustained, conscious union with God."

It is the life of a loving soul with the loving God.

A wholly supernatural life, spiritual (not sensual) interior, secret, hidden from the eyes of men: hence its name Mystical, which means something hidden.

A certain confusion has arisen in comparatively recent times, as to the meaning of the Mystical life. There is the school of the wider definition, which by mystical life understands purely and simply that life of active, conscious union of the soul with God, in the secret of the heart, as here described. Then there is the school of the narrow definition which, by mystical life, understands one of extraordinary miraculous favours from God to the soul, such as visions, revelations, raptures, the gift of prophecy and of miracles, etc. This latter meaning is quite wrong. The wider meaning is the

traditional one, the only one current for more than fifteen centuries; in fact, up to the times of St. John of the Cross and St. Francis of Sales, and really the only legitimate and rational one.

The psalmist says: *But it is good for me to adhere to my God* (Ps. lxxii, 28). Mystical life is that: actually and perseveringly adhering or clinging to God: turning to Him constantly, assiduously; finding delight in Him, making this the one supreme and sole business on earth: the *unum necessarium.*

Now, is it a one-sided affair, one in which man alone is concerned and does all the work by himself? No. Two are actively engaged in the mystical life, namely: the loving soul and the loving God, and God even more than the soul; for it is God who begins by exciting the soul to seek Him, and who raises her above her natural weakness, sustains her throughout, and who rewards her puny efforts with the magnificent gift of His divine Self; whilst, on her own part, the loving soul answers with alacrity the call of God, faithfully co-operates with the lights and motions of His grace, and yields herself wholly to His divine embrace.

Mystical life, then, we may as well call, at once, life with a partner (*une vie à deux*), as is the married life; with this difference, that in human espousals, the partner is another human being, whilst in mystical life, the partner (wonderful as this may sound) is God. And with this further difference, that human union is prin-

cipally a consortium according to the flesh. *They two shall be in one flesh* (Gen. xi, 24), whilst mystical life is a union of spirits: *God is a Spirit* (John iv, 24), and *he, who is joined to the Lord, is one spirit*" (1 Cor. vi, 17). The flesh enters into the compact only to be made one with the spirit, to be first crushed by mortification, and then raised above itself; made spiritual in a way.

To the mystic, God is all in all, and other things do not count, except in relation to God. The mystic lives in the conscious presence of God, in the willed and loved company of God, in secret intercourse with God, in the enjoyment of God. There is a constant exchange of love between that soul and God, as between the bride and the spouse, as set forth in the Canticle of Canticles. Only all this, of course, is purely spiritual, and is all hidden in the secret of the loving heart, jealously shielded from the profane gaze of creatures, for *it is good to hide the secret of a King* (Tob. xii, 7).

Mystical life, when it comes after a life of tepidity, inaugurates a new order of relations between God and man; new and very special relations, more intimate, more loving, more sweet, more delicate and tender, both on the part of God and on the part of man. This order of relations was predicted in Osee (ii, 19, 20): *I will espouse thee to me for ever: and I will espouse thee to me in justice, and judgment, and in mercy, and in commiserations. And I will espouse thee to me in faith; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord.* It was not so before, nor is it thus with the non-mystic. It is indeed

for the soul a new state of life, but it is the right one, the one that should have prevailed from the beginning, the one that should always prevail.

Mystical life is simply the holy life God has planned for us as a temporary substitute for the bliss of heaven, and a prelude to it; a life in which all the resources brought by sanctifying grace are fully worked out; where the Sacraments are made to yield all their fruits, and the presence of the Holy Ghost in the soul, with His seven gifts, is given all its efficacy.

Mystical life is the normal Christian life, the full Christian life, Christian life as it should be lived by all, and everywhere, and in all circumstances; whilst the Christian life as it is lived, alas! by the immense majority of people, is simply abnormal and monstrous, shorn of its bearings upon all the details of life, and deprived of its efficacy and of most of its precious fruits.

Mystical life is a human life made supernatural and wholly divine in all its manifestations, even the most lowly and material ones, such as eating, sleeping, recreation, material work. *Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God* (1 Cor. x, 31). The mystic becomes *deiform*, not only in the substance of his soul, as is the case with every man in a state of grace, but also in all his activities. In him, the divine ideal, nay God Himself, has impregnated and transformed everything. *I live*, says St. Paul, *now not I; but Christ liveth in me* (Galat. ii, 20). God lives in the mystic, throws out and projects His divine life in him and the mystic in his turn

lives in God. *Your life*, says St. Paul, *is hidden with Christ in God* (Col. iii, 3).

From the very start, the mystic, in order to find God, is led to retire into himself, which act is called *introversion*; and once he has there found Him whom his soul loveth, for *lo the Kingdom of God is within you* (Luke xvii, 21), the mystic with great delight loses himself in God, and would fain never quit Him to live with the outer world of creatures. Even when compelled to have converse with the world and to attend to exterior occupations, the better part of him is away from it all, secretly clinging to God and loving Him and enjoying Him.

The mystic, without neglecting any of his external duties, simply lives with God, simply lives upon God, feasts upon God, finds in God his all in all.

To him God is (as He is indeed) the great reality, the only being worthy of perpetually engrossing his attention and winning and retaining for evermore the affections of his heart.

He exults in the thought of the presence of God, of His goodness, of His sanctity, of His divine life and infinite bliss and infinite loveliness. He is never tired of speaking to God of his love, and of laying himself open as far as possible to the Divine influences.

And God on His part is not backward with His servant: He lays hands on all the faculties of the mystic and makes His Divine presence felt in him. He floods his mind with wonderful illuminations, and his will with marvellous infusions of strength; and at times (though not at

all times), God fills the heart of His servant with ineffable sweetness; whilst at other times He tries him with dryness of spirit and the withdrawal of heavenly consolation. But this never discourages the faithful servant. He knows God is always there, invisibly holding him, and steering his soul safely through the dense fog and the breakers, as a skilful pilot does the ship which a diffident captain has surrendered into his hands.

It is just this wonderful life with God as a partner which we call the mystical life.

Shall we say that it is a very extraordinary sort of life? If by extraordinary, we mean that it is seldom met with: yes, alas! it is so. But if we mean an impracticable, a well-nigh impossible life, one meant only for a very few chosen souls, we are in error. No; mystical life is neither impracticable nor well-nigh impossible, nor is it only for the few. It is simply the very perfection of Christian life, to which we are called, and we shall be severely punished in Purgatory if we have not attained to it. Mystical life appears to us extraordinary and well-nigh impossible only because we are *of little faith* (Mat. vi, 30), and have allowed our charity to grow cold.

Mystical life is the right kind of life: any other is wrong.

CHAPTER II

WHO ARE MYSTICS AND WHO ARE NOT

EVIDENTLY non-mystics are first of all, those who are in the state of mortal sin. Far from living with God, these live with His enemy the devil. They have given themselves over to him, they belong to him: he is with them and in them. Yes, in them; they are his dwelling. Read St. Luke, ch. xi, 24-26. A terrible state of affairs indeed.

Non-mystics also are all those tepid and negligent Christians, who, though not habitually in a state of sin, and therefore not living with the devil, cannot however be said to live with God, but rather with self and the world of creatures. Though in the state of grace, they do not do the actions of grace, but those of a purely natural life. The Holy Ghost in them is not allowed to have His own way: they hold Him, so to say, bound hand and foot, and gagged; they offer Him that indignity! They have not faith enough to believe that God can make them happy; they prefer to try creatures; and though these invariably fail them, they are content to renew the experiment again and again. There is therefore no intimate intercourse between them and God: they never have anything to say to Him from their heart; they take no

notice of His presence. They treat Him as a stranger. *Behold,* says our Lord, *I stand at the gate and knock* (Apoc. iii, 20), but they turn a deaf ear to Him, and withal they are perfectly satisfied with themselves. A very sad condition this, and how dangerous! Read what our Lord says of it in the Apocalypse (iii, 14-20).

Non-mystics also, but quite innocently, are very young children who, though baptised, and therefore in a state of grace, and fit for the immediate possession of heaven should they die, are nevertheless incapable of union with God by active love, which requires discernment by the understanding, and the full play of our queen-faculty, the will.

Many believe themselves to be on the mystical way and qualified to write and speak about it, who have no true experience of it and do not so much as suspect what it really is. On the other hand, many lead the mystical life unawares and sometimes are very far advanced in it without suspecting that God is doing very great things in them, or realizing that theirs is the mystical life. I have found such in all walks of life, notably among the poor and little children and among illiterate persons, and even among the savage tribes of North America.

There are also false mystics, tools of the devil, who would mislead even the true children of God, if these were not on their guard. Their errors generally run into formal heresies and they are easily known by their contempt of the teaching and authority of the Church. Such were the Gnostics of early Christianity, many

sects of the Middle Ages; in modern times Molinos, Madame Guyon, and others, and the Modernists of our own days.

There are those who would make the mystical life to consist chiefly in extraordinary graces, such as visions, voices, revelations. If truly humble they will certainly be led to seek none of these things, much less to endeavour to induce them; while if vain and foolish, they may covet the glory of them, and not being able to lay hands on the true gifts of God, they may take to themselves a worthless counterfeit, work themselves into self-induced ecstasies, and self-suggested revelations, and in any case, lay themselves open to the crafty deceptions of the Evil One. Bishops and priests, as well as Religious Superiors, have to be on their guard against pious imposters, hallucinated, self-deluded souls, and to suppress any tendency to a visionary spirit that may manifest itself. For it is such as these, that have brought the very name of Mysticism into ill repute; with how little reason may be perceived when we consider its true nature as already set forth.

The true mystic does not desire visions, revelations or extraordinary states of either body or soul; and if these are vouchsafed to him, he fears them and he would rather wish for their withdrawal, knowing they do not constitute sanctity and are never entirely without danger. He wishes to pass unnoticed. He is most simple and unaffected, most humble and obedient. Outwardly he does just the same things as other men in his profession and surroundings do. His

glory is within. *All the glory of the King's daughter is within* (Ps. xliv, 14).

There are, in the wide range of Christian life, privileged situations, where it is more easy and at the same time more imperative to lead the mystical life, by reason of the sacredness of the functions to be exercised and of the abundance of graces received in them. Such are the clerical state, the religious state, also the state of virginity or widowhood in the world, when persons resolve to give themselves wholly to God, though unable for some reason to enter religion. This notwithstanding, it remains absolutely true that mystical life, even in its fulness and perfection, is without need of a special vocation; it is FOR ALL MEN, of whatever age, profession, or condition of life, as is abundantly proved by the history of the Church and the annals of sanctity.

In order to begin to live the mystical life, only two things are required: first, the state of grace, secondly, a little love or good will. Good will enough to seek after God, to pay attention to God, to listen to Him, to talk lovingly to Him. Nothing more is required: neither science, nor any sort of talent, nor even acquired virtues. The sinner, fresh from a life of sin, can begin at once and indeed should do so; as David did when he repented of his great crime and gave vent to his feelings in the seven penitential Psalms; as Magdalen did when she dared to cover, with the kisses of her polluted lips, the feet of the Most Holy One, bathing them with her tears and drying them with her dishevelled hair; the most famous penitents of all ages.

Even the good thief on his cross by the side of the dying Saviour lived one or two hours of the intensest and most genuine mystical life. In fact, there, on Calvary, we find all classes of mystics represented in the whole reach of the mystical life, thus: First the Most Holy One, the pattern of all mystics, Jesus crucified; next, His Immaculate Virgin Mother, ADDOLORATA, the Mystical Rose; then St. John, the virgin Apostle, the Beloved, the spoiled child, so to say, of Divine love; close to him, Magdalen, the woman that was a sinner, to whom much had been forgiven because she had loved much; and finally the good thief, a convert of the very last hour from a life of the blackest crimes, who was nevertheless made sensible of the divinity of Christ and turned into the first public herald of it; and who was that very day to step from his gibbet of infamy into paradise. And Jesus said to him: *Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with me in paradise* (Luke xxiii, 43).

CHAPTER III

THE LAW OF PROGRESS IN THE MYSTICAL LIFE

THE doctrine of this chapter is set forth against negligent and tepid souls who do not care to make any progress, against Quietists who aim at establishing themselves in a state where there would be no striving after better things, and against those Protestants who contend that faith alone is necessary without any good works, and finally against some souls of good will who allow themselves to remain stationary either through faint-heartedness or out of a false conception of the nature and exigencies of mystical life.

In the first chapter of this work I have been at some pains to describe the mystic life in its fulness and perfection. But one cannot expect to arrive at that perfection at the outset, any more than one can reach the top of a mountain at a single stride, or grow from childhood to the full stature of a man in a day, or reap a crop at the same instant that one does the planting or the sowing; any more than one expects to see a young bird fly before it has grown wings, or a babe at the breast do a man's work.

It is true, as theologians assure us, that by one single act of theirs, in co-operation with

the grace of God, the blessed Angels were at once saved and consummated in sanctity, so that one moment saw them *on the way*, and the next arrived *at the goal*. But things do not proceed in the same way with men. Our nature, inferior to that of the pure spirits, has a mode of action less perfect, so that our trial is lengthened into a period of time.

Moreover, our present conditions for striving after the perfection of sanctity are not those which existed for Adam and Eve, who were innocent. We are now in the condition of probation under sin, that is with the consequences of original sin on each individual soul and body, and in the midst of a world of sin, in the midst of hosts of enemies visible and invisible; this tends to make our progress more difficult, and would make it impossible, were it not that "*where sin abounded, grace did more abound*" (Rom. v, 20).

It is therefore only by a multitude of successive, varied and more or less difficult acts that we shall develop in ourselves our latent aptitude for sanctity, which the grace of God, through the Sacraments, has deposited in us; that we shall grow to the full stature of the perfect man in Christ Jesus, and that we shall yield the fruits God has a right to expect of us: in a word, that we shall come to the perfection of the mystical life. Nay, even should we be happy enough to attain to that very perfection (as I shall describe it in the next chapter), it will rest with us to increase it indefinitely, until the very moment of death. For, what is marvellous in

our spiritual growth is that, whereas we cannot add one cubit, no, not even half an inch, to our bodily stature, there is no limit to the cubits we may add to the stature of our soul. This process of the transformation of our natural man, or of the old Adam in us into the new man which is Christ, slow and gradual and painful as it is, is a most marvellous thing, a sight for God and His Angels.

Now, man has here one advantage of his present condition, one that might almost make the Angels and Saints of God in glory jealous of him, namely, that he can do and suffer every day and every hour something more for the love of God, gain more merit, enlarge his capacity of loving God, grow in sanctity, and ascend higher and higher on the ladder of perfection.

Not only may we do so, but we should do so, we must do so; and if we fail so to do we are guilty, and we shall have to answer for it. Every day ought to find us further removed from our wonted vices and imperfections than the day before. Every successive hour spent in the service of God, every fresh act of piety such as the celebration of the Divine sacrifice or assistance at It, or Holy Communion, or Confession, or prayer; every Pater or Ave or ejaculatory prayer ought, not only to make us so much the richer in merit, but also, and at the same time, so much the more skilled in the art of serving God and our brethren, in the art of overcoming self and vanquishing the devil, especially in the art of prayer and contemplation.

John Ruskin, the great art critic, wrote that a

true painter never makes a fresh picture that is not better than the one he painted before ; because each time he sets to his work and gives his whole heart and soul to it, he becomes more master of his tools and materials and of his own faculties. Only the negligent or abject-minded man, who looks upon his noble art but as a means of making money, will content himself with multiplying pictures without any change for the better, without gaining skill in the art; nay, he will even deteriorate and grow incapable. It is much the same in the spiritual life with those half-hearted Christians who are content to go through the same exercises of piety a thousand times mechanically, without stirring themselves to a greater love of God. Not only do they not advance, but they will surely deteriorate and perhaps even come at last to give it all up as they find no consolation whatever in these exercises.

We have so-called pious people who say numerous prayers and receive the Sacraments often enough to turn them into seraphs, but they do not advance a step on the way to perfection. They are satisfied with the fruit to be gained *ex opere operato,* and do not bestir themselves to produce the fruit *ex opere operantis* which should never be separated from the former: that is to say, they receive the good things of God, but turn them to no account, just as some men eat hearty meals but do no work.

That we are not at liberty so to act, but that we ought ever to progress, to grow in sanctity, to climb up the ladder of virtues and to become

more united to God, is shown by innumerable passages of Holy Scripture in both Testaments. Our Lord tells us: *Be you therefore perfect as also your heavenly Father is perfect,* thereby opening out before us an infinite course, the goal of which we can never say we have reached. Hence the Glossa quoted by St. Thomas 2.2. q. 24 *a.* 7, says: "Let none of the faithful, however much he may have progressed, say: That is enough." In saying this he would step out of the road before reaching the end. Hence St. Paul (Phil. iii, 13, 14): *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended. But one thing I do: forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I press towards the mark, to the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Christ Jesus.* And Prov. iv, 18, says: *The path of the just as a shining light goeth forward and increaseth even to perfect day.* And Psalm lxxxiii, 8: *They shall go from virtue to virtue.* Our Lord again commands us (Luke xix, 13): *Trade till I come,* and in the parable of the talents He shows us the reward and the meed of praise bestowed on those good servants who doubled what they had, whilst he that wrapped his talent in a napkin is rebuked and punished.

Hence also the Council of Trent (Sess. VI, c. x) speaks thus of increasing our justification, after we have once received it: "Therefore, such as have thus been justified and made friends of God and servants of the Faith, are renewed day by day as they go, according to the Apostle, from virtue to virtue; that is to say, by morti-

fying the members of their flesh and turning them into weapons of justice, unto sanctification, through the observance of the Commandments of God and of the Church, in the very justice they have received through the grace of Christ; their faith being united with good works, they grow and become more justified, as it is written: *He that is just, let him be justified still* (Apoc. xxii, 11). And again: *Be not afraid to be justified even to death* (Ecclus. xviii, 22). And again: *Do you see that by works a man is justified; and not by faith only?* (James ii, 24). Now it is this increase of sanctity which the Church prays for in these words: "Give us, Lord, an increase of faith, hope and charity."

God does not always allow the mystic to see his progress, as this might endanger his humility; but there is an infallible sign by which one may know at least that one is indeed progressing; namely, this, that the sincere and earnest desire to make progress exists.

We may stir ourselves up to that holy desire by observing how worldlings are never satisfied with what they are or with what they have: they always want more, and work themselves to death for it. What they do for temporal riches, honour and pleasure, shall we be less eager to do for eternal bliss and glory?

Therefore, whatever others may think of us, or do, or may not do, let us be up and doing, and never relax and never stop till we hear the words of the divine Master: *Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!* (Mat. xxv, 23).

CHAPTER IV

THE THREE STAGES OF THE MYSTICAL LIFE

IN the foregoing chapter we have ascertained that progress in the mystical life must be gradual, steady and unlimited. We ought not to linger on the road, nor halt, nor turn back; neither should we lose precious time loitering in the bye-paths that lead nowhere, nor cover the same ground over and over by moving in a circle. We must not crawl, but march briskly, straight ahead, on and on, ever higher and higher.

Spiritual writers use various comparisons to make us understand at the same time the process of the mystical life and its oneness of design, and the stages of it with their necessary consecutiveness.

St. John Climachus compares it to a ladder, St. John of the Cross to a mountain, St. Teresa to a fortress with various mansions, others to a road with relays: St. Benedict, in his Rule, names twelve degrees of humility, Bl. Angela of Foligno describes eighteen steps by which God brought her to the grace of a thorough conversion. Philip of the Most Holy Trinity, Carmelite, in his THEOLOGIA MYSTICA, distinguishes five successive stages of the spiritual life, to wit: 1st, that of the sensible delights

of grace immediately following conversion or vocation; 2nd, that of the purification of the senses; 3rd, that of the enlightenment of the understanding; 4th, that of the purifying of the intellect; 5th, that of the perfect union with God.

Truth to tell, there are well nigh innumerable degrees and diversities of graces, and probably no two souls on the way are found to be exactly on the same level, just as no two angels and no two saints in heaven have the same degree of glory. Without therefore entering upon a more detailed account of these many degrees, it will be enough for our purpose to set down at some length the division of the spiritual life into the three classical stages, namely:

1. That of Beginners.
2. That of the Advanced.
3. That of the Perfect.

The treatment of these three stages will cover the whole subject of the degrees of the spiritual life, just as a description of the three periods of childhood, youth and manhood, that of man; or as an account of the foundations, wall structure and roof, that of a house; and will enable us to understand the essential workings of the mystical life.

The first stage, that of the Beginners, is the initiatory one, and is called *The Way of Purity*. Quite a proper appellation, whether the beginner be an innocent child, a virgin soul, since then its main feature is indeed the absence of the contamination of sin; or again, whether the

beginner be just coming from a bad life, because then the main characteristic of this stage for him will be the struggle against sin and vice, in order to secure this wonderful prize of purity.

The second stage or middle one, that of the Advanced, is called *The Way of Enlightenment*, and its main characteristic is ordinarily the acquisition and practice of virtues. To understand this we must bear in mind that the soul of man is the mirror of the Godhead. Sin had previously laid on that mirror a thick coating of unutterable filth, and even after that has been cleared away by a good Confession, the soul emits the smoke of yet unruly passions, which prevents the beams that issue from the countenance of God from being reflected therein. But as soon as the passions have been repressed, then the countenance of God will shine freely upon the soul and make it luminous, enlightening it splendidly. If now by the prism of analysis we isolate the rays of divine light which the soul reflects, they will be found to be so many virtues, namely, the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity, the infused moral virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

The third stage, that of the Perfect, is called *The Way of Union*, and its main characteristic is always a very high degree of mental prayer, practically uninterrupted.

Though such be indeed the main characteristics, respectively, of the three ways: fight against sin, heroic practice of virtues, and mental prayer at its highest, nevertheless we must note also that these three elements are all found to-

gether, in each of the three degrees, though in varying proportions. There is the purification and the enlightenment and the divine contemplation proper to beginners; and there is the purification, practice of virtues and mental prayer proper to the advanced; and finally, there is also, for the perfect, still further purification, and still greater heights of virtues, as well as contemplation at its highest to be attained. The spiritual man grows all together: no one part of him after another, as one might say the lower limbs first, then after a while the trunk, and only ultimately the head. No, every part of him is there from the beginning, proportionately small, of course, and every part grows harmoniously with the others, just as the hands and feet and brain and heart of a child will grow with the rest of his body.

It is failure to grasp that harmonious, all-round development of the spiritual man, that has caused modern writers to introduce such unnatural distinctions and separations in things that God meant to go together from the very beginning and all along. Let it be understood, once for all, that even a beginner is to be allowed divine contemplation and not to be exclusively confined to the dreary occupation of fighting his dominant fault. There is a very apposite remark of Father Buckler, O.P., in his book on *Spiritual Perfection*: "No small consolation comes to souls anxious to advance when they understand that the work of their perfection lies in the development of their love." In *Sancta Sophia*, Father Baker has one chapter to show how the

exercise of love causes illumination. Hence I conclude that souls are to be urged to begin that exercise of love as early as possible.

How will one know that one has succeeded in purifying oneself and is fit for the second stage of the spiritual life? Abbot Cisneros, in his *Exercises of the Spiritual Life*, answers: "When one has attained these three gifts: 1st, against sloth—alacrity; 2nd, against concupiscence—self-control; 3rd, against ill-will—kindliness. Then may the soul, without delay, climb the higher way of enlightenment."

And how shall we know that we can place ourselves in the group of the *Advanced*? Cardinal Bona, in his *Manuductio ad cœlum* (ch. xix), answers: "When you have such a mastery over yourself as to possess your soul in unity, when things of this world displease you, and you love solitude, and you are athirst after perfection, and you despise the opinions and judgments of men."

Finally, one may know that one has reached the last stage when one has the gift of the Presence of God and of the Beatitudes and of the Fruits of the Holy Ghost. Divine union is an interior state in which the soul of man is completely surrendered to the action of the Holy Ghost. In all his willed and deliberate acts, man is then in permanent collaboration with God; nay more, he leaves the initiative to God to such an extent that, beyond the plain calls of duty and charity, he will not move himself as of himself to anything, but rather will wait to be moved to it by the Holy Ghost; and when the

Holy Ghost does not move him to anything in particular, that man is satisfied to remain peacefully in his union with God.

An amazing fact is that a comparatively enormous number of persons remain beginners all their lives. Very few, even among religious and clerics and secular persons making a profession of piety, very few indeed are those who really go beyond the threshold of the mystical life and who answer the loving, pressing invitation of God: *Friend, go up higher* (Luke xiv, 10).

And it is not all due to indifference or want of generosity, but in many cases simply to ignorance, or want of proper spiritual direction, or to the altogether wrong idea that mystical life in its fulness and perfection is not made for people like them, and that it requires a very special vocation.

Now, this is a great pity. For it is certain that it requires at least as much effort to keep oneself in the first stage, without falling back into downright tepidity, as it would to go up higher: as though a man were to try to keep a boat stationary in mid-stream by force of oars. He would have all the exertion, if not more, of those who pass him and go up stream, without their exhilaration and advantages. Oh! when shall we understand, that a traveller after the first days of fatigue, climbs the mountain-side with greater alacrity than he previously walked on low, swampy ground? Mounting up, the air becomes keener and purer, and his buoyancy of spirit proportionately greater. And if the objects he

leaves below dwindle into insignificance and he can expect to have but few or no companions in these high solitudes, yet his heart is cheered at the ever widening circle of the horizon and the magnificent prospect of land and sky, and at the felt majestic presence of God. Thus it is also and much more in the progressive stages of the mystical life.

Shew, O Lord, Thy ways to me, and teach me Thy paths (Ps. xxiv, 4).

CHAPTER V

DIVISION OF THE MYSTICAL LIFE

MYSTICAL life is divided into two parts: 1st, Divine Contemplation, and 2nd, Saintly Action.

Action, and Contemplation of some sort, are the two elements which are found in the life of every adult human being, be his life either purely natural or supernatural, be it tepid or fervent: with this difference however: that in the case of the mystic, God is the all in all of his life, whilst in the case of the others, God hardly enters therein, self or creatures are almost its all in all.

When one is occupied with God, when God is the direct, immediate object of one's loving attention, that is Divine Contemplation. In its widest sense, Divine Contemplation comprises a great variety of acts: spiritual reading on the divine essence and perfections, or on the mysteries of Our Lord; meditation on the same; vocal prayer, certain pious exercises (such, for instance, as the Way of the Cross), celebration of the Holy Sacrifice or participation therein, and finally mental prayer proper.

Saintly Action in contradistinction to Divine Contemplation is, when for the love of God one is busy about something, which is not God, which nevertheless does not entail the loss of one's union

with God. In our present life we cannot all have direct union with God, for two reasons: first, because our natural frailty makes us incapable of such an uninterrupted and exclusive attention to God; secondly, because certain duties to ourselves and to our neighbours claim a part of our attention, for the very honour and service of God. This action, of course, does not necessarily imply bustle and noise or much moving about.

This first great division of the mystical life into its two parts is set forth in the words of our Saviour: *The Lord Thy God thou shalt adore, and Him only shalt thou serve* (Mat. iv, 10), ADORATION thus stands for Divine Contemplation, and SERVICE for Saintly Action.

These two elements are always found in every saintly life upon earth, though, of course, in varying proportion in different persons, and even in the same person at different periods of his progress onwards. As a rule, beginners are more active than contemplative. Certain natures are very little gifted with an aptitude for contemplation, whilst others, on the contrary, have very little for action. But it remains true that every mystic's life is full of these two elements, Divine Contemplation and Saintly Action, as (to use a homely simile) a fresh egg is full of white and yelk. And as in an egg, there is no place for anything else, so in the mystic's life there is no place for sinful or even purely natural affections. All is supernatural.

Though Divine Contemplation and Saintly Action are always blended together, still now

one, and now the other, gains the ascendancy. The two phases alternate continually, succeeding each other with a greater stress now upon contemplation, now upon action, according to the dispositions of the moment and the demands laid upon one by circumstances.

In thus passing from Divine Contemplation to Saintly Action and *vice versâ*, one finds the relief that our frail nature craves for. In the sweetness of prayer and contemplation, one finds repose from the worries of active life, and, on the other hand, the wholesome distractions of saintly activity help one to bear the heavy weight of divine contemplation.

Again, though contemplation and action are, of necessity, found in the daily life of every mystic on earth, still in some lives one of the two elements so markedly predominates over the other, as to give the life of the mystic its peculiar colouring. Thus the life of some mystics is almost all taken up with the direct occupation with God: they are accordingly called Contemplatives. Such were the Fathers of the Desert, the holy Hermits and Recluses of the Middle Ages: such are nowadays Carmelite nuns, Carthusian monks, and most of the enclosed religious Orders. Others, on the contrary, give a markedly predominant share to Saintly activity, in the works of mercy—spiritual and corporal. Such are nearly all Christians in the world, and many religious institutes, as Sisters of Charity, the Teaching Orders, the Hospitallers, etc. Besides this Contemplative and that Active form of life, there is a third

kind, the Apostolic one, which is the proper form of life of all apostolic men, either secular or regular, of Bishops, Priests in the world, Missionaries, Superiors of numerous kinds of religious communities of both sexes. All these persons, on account of their exalted position and sacred character and the special nature of their occupations, have to carry to their maximum of intensity and in their most excellent form, and in almost equal measure, Divine Contemplation and Saintly Action both at one and the same time.

How are people to be guided in their choice of one or the other of these three modes of the mystical life? By the holy will of God in their regard. Now that is made manifest by one or the other or all of the following signs: 1st, one's own natural inclination and special aptitudes; 2nd, the exigencies of circumstance; 3rd, the advice or even command of those in authority over one.

We must be careful when speaking of Action and Contemplation to give to our words but a relative and conventional value. For, indeed, adoration is action also. The sublimest act of adoration, namely, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, is an action full of movement. And contemplation, though it seems repose, is action also; nay, it is action at its highest, it is action at white heat, so to say. All this notwithstanding, it is proper for us to retain the two consecrated terms, being careful to assign to each no other meaning than is agreed upon by all the writers of spirituality.

This may also help one to understand what

theologians mean, when they contend that, in heaven, there will be no more action but only contemplation. It might seem at first a rather dreary outlook, but it only means that in heaven there will be no more defects of our own to correct, since we shall be constituted in a state of perfect charity; nor will there be any distress of our neighbour for us to alleviate by our exertions, as all these being also established in perfect charity, will be happy. Thus will be suppressed the two forms of saintly action, of which we shall presently speak, and we may rejoice that they will be no longer necessary in heaven. And as for there being in heaven only contemplation, it means that God will, at last, be manifestly all in all to the blessed; that He will be the unfailing object of their enjoyment, both in Himself directly, and indirectly in the other Blessed, whether taken individually or collectively. They will have so perfectly become forms of God, filled with God, reflecting God, that their loving one another, their conversations, songs, flights through space, solemn processions, explorations of all the depth and width and height of the material universe and of the wonderful world of spirits, all these will be but so many manifestations of the divine joy, overflowing in all the channels of their created natures.

When the blessed will be contemplating God in Himself it will be *Contemplatio Matutina* (as theologians call it); when enjoying Him in their own selves and in His other works it will be *Contemplatio Vespertina*: thus there will always be Divine Contemplation, and withal a good

deal of action and motion on the part of the blessed. They will pass from the direct contemplation of the Divine Essence in itself to the indirect contemplation of It in Its works, and *vice versâ*, with ever renewed eagerness and never satiated appetite, together with a full expansion of all the faculties of body and soul; those only of the purely vegetative life being abolished, as their provisional functions in the great scheme of things created, will then be at an end. It is what the Apostle signifies in the words: *Meat for the belly and the belly for the meats: but God shall destroy both it and them* (1 Cor. vi, 13). It does not mean that any part of the body will be wanting to its integrity in the resurrection of the blessed, but that its lower functions will be no more, it having entered upon the glorious life of the spirit. On the other hand, all the other enjoyments, either of body or mind, of senses, memory, imagination, intellect, will, bodily motion, the artistic faculty, etc., all these will be carried to their highest powers and fullest exercise. In this sense there will be action, intense action, of each one of the blessed personally, and of all of them in groups and in their universality—action of so grand a description that for us it is at present absolutely unimaginable.

This much, to help us understand the relative and restricted meaning of these two terms of mystical theology: Action, Contemplation.

CHAPTER VI

SUB-DIVISION OF THE MYSTICAL LIFE AND CO-ORDINATION OF ITS PARTS

SAINTLY Action is sub-divided into two parts, namely: Interior Action and Exterior Action.

That saintly action which takes place within the soul and has for its object self, the regulation of the affections, the implanting of virtue, and the eradication of vice, is called Interior Action. On the other hand, that saintly action which has for its object the world of creatures outside —principally our neighbour, towards whom we exercise ourselves in the duties of justice and charity—is called Exterior Action.

This gives us, as a last analysis, the division of the mystical life into three parts:

1st. Divine Contemplation in its broadest sense.

2nd. Internal Saintly Action or Ascetics proper.

3rd. External Saintly Action or Good Works —Divine Contemplation coming first, Saintly Action second and subordinate; and that Saintly Action, which has our own selves for its object, passing before that which has for its object

things or persons outside of us. So that our saintly interior action appears as the immediate fruit of our divine contemplation, and furthermore, our saintly external action is shown to be the offspring, so to say, of these two united, viz., divine contemplation and saintly interior action. When self has been renounced by saintly interior action and the soul has been filled with God by divine contemplation, it will inevitably overflow in deeds of charity and kindness to all.

It is necessary to insist on the union and consecutiveness and subordination of the parts of mystical life. In our opinion, much of the conspicuous failure of modern piety is due to ignorance or wilful disregard of this doctrine. A complaint is raised sometimes that active life is destructive of piety, or again, that contemplation disqualifies one for apostolic work; as though these two, Divine Contemplation and Saintly Action, were antagonistic. Far from this being the case, one cannot exist without the other; neither may be sacrificed for the sake of the other, or both perish: only, each must be given its proper comparative degree of precedence or subordination. One must be careful not to neglect prayer and the care of one's own interior under pretext of the exigencies of active life. Is it not remarkable that the Rule of St. Benedict, which has formed some of the greatest workers, whether in the fields of erudition, apostolic zeal or the material arts of civilization, gives no distinct directions as to external work. It is wholly taken up with the care of forming the man of prayer and ascetic habits, and

nothing more, yet it has proved sufficient—for the Benedictine Monk thus formed has found himself perfectly fitted for every work of zeal.

The order of the ten Commandments of God confirms this co-ordination of the parts of mystical life. The first three Commandments set forth our duty to God, or Divine Contemplation in its widest meaning. The last seven Commandments, though they only mention our neighbours, have for their very first effect (and that is self-evident) to impose and to produce order in our own hearts by interior action, before it can take effect in our dealings with our brethren by external action. For Our Lord says: *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh* (Mat. xii, 34), and again: *From the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies* (Mat. xv, 19).

It is not difficult to discover again this same co-ordination of the parts of mystical life inculcated in the first three petitions of the Our Father: First, *Hallowed be Thy Name,* which is done by Divine worship, both public and private, or Divine Contemplation. Next, *Thy kingdom come,* which is procured by obedience to the laws of God, which obedience has first to be established in the heart by Interior Action. Finally, *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,* which can only be realized by our taking in hand the interests of God in the whole world, i.e., Saintly External Action. Here we see how wide is the range of saintly external action. Besides his immediate duties to those around him, the mystic is deeply concerned in the welfare of

his neighbour and actively employs himself on his behalf. He does not ask, *Am I my brother's keeper?* (Gen. iv, 9) to answer it in the negative. Every form of distress of body or soul forcibly appeals to him, and he lays himself out to relieve it in the measure of his power. The more united he is to God by divine contemplation and dead to self by previous saintly action, the more efficacious will he also be in this.

Our duty to God takes precedence over that which we owe to ourselves or to others, because it is the very reason of our duty to ourselves and our neighbours. And it is good for us that Contemplation should thus hold the first place, for we do more and we gain more for ourselves and for others when we are with God, when we pay attention to Him, than in any other way. We are enabled to perform our duty to ourselves and our neighbours only through the help of the grace of God, which is obtained by prayer and the Sacraments; that is, by direct intercourse with God, which is an act of divine contemplation.

Irrespective even of our manifold relations to Him, God claims our loving attention first, and more than either ourselves or the whole universe of things, precisely on account of His transcendental excellence. Loving attention to God, or divine contemplation of some sort, ought, according to St. Thomas, to be the first use man makes of his reason, when he begins to know himself, and to discern good from evil. By Divine command, loving attention to God ought to fill and sanctify the first day of each week. A Christian need not be told that it ought also

to be the very first act in the morning of each day. Loving attention to God, according to Holy Writ, should be our ever recurring care, our constant and supreme occupation, the most engrossing one, the one about which we should be most solicitous. And so it is to the mystic. In the words of the sacred liturgy, he confesses that "Vere dignum et justum est, æquum et salutare, nos tibi, semper et ubique, gratias agere." It is truly just and right and good and wholesome for us always and everywhere to give thanks to God. Truth to tell, the non-mystics do not feel thus keenly about it, but they are all wrong.

This doctrine of the supremacy and primacy of divine contemplation holds good (within certain limits) for sinners freshly converted as well as for saints. It would be a fatal mistake to say: Let them first put some kind of order in their interior dispositions before they be permitted or induced to apply themselves to any sort of contemplation; when that is done, then, and *only then*, may they turn to God. No! no! let them, first of all things, turn to God that they may be enabled, through love of Him and by His grace, to put their interior dispositions in order. Besides, this right ordering of the interior man is a work of time; it cannot be accomplished all at once, whilst on the other hand the precept of communion with God is pressing urgently and constantly, and may not be postponed. *We ought always to pray, and not to faint* (Luke xviii, 1). Moreover, God is the Master of His own ways and bestows His gifts

as He pleases without following any set rule known to human wisdom; now, if He sees fit to give graces of prayer to a beginner (as observation proves that He often does), it is not for us to say Him nay.

This doctrine of the primacy or precedence of Divine Contemplation holds good even for young children. When Our Lord said *Suffer the little children and forbid them not to come to Me* (Mat. xix, 14), He gave us to understand that He wishes them to draw near Him by a contemplation proportionate to the development of their faculties. See how the magnificent Decree of Pius X, convoking all the little ones to communion and even to daily communion, confirms this view!

Writers who tell us that sinners and children are incapable of divine contemplation, have in mind the acme and perfection of divine contemplation, which certainly is acquired but very late in spiritual life. Notwithstanding this, it remains true that *acts*, *occasional acts*, of divine contemplation, are called for, long before one reaches perfection, nay, at the very outset of Christian life. Of this distinction between the acts and the habits of divine contemplation we shall have more to say later. Let what has been said in this chapter suffice for the present, to place beyond the possibility of a doubt the fact that in the mystical life there must come first, God, by Divine Contemplation; next to God, ourselves, by Internal Saintly Action; and last, our relations to persons and things outside, by External Saintly Action.

CHAPTER VII

THE CO-WORKERS IN THE MYSTICAL LIFE: THE MYSTIC AND THE BLESSED TRINITY

We are God's coadjutors (1 Cor. iii, 9).

MYSTICAL Life is an experimental perception, dim, but intensely real, of the Blessed Trinity.

The Most Holy Trinity is the mystery of mysteries; in fact, the one, great, living Mystery; and yet, in itself, the simplest of all: it is God, and when this has been said, what more can be added?

But, to His intellectual creatures, and especially to us men, the Blessed Trinity is rather an immense cluster of mysteries, one gleam from a single star of which is of absolutely dazzling effulgence to the purblind eyes of man in his present condition. No matter! the mystic enjoys basking in this warm light which he does not see, even as a blind man in the glowing warmth of the sun

To the unspiritual, the mystery of the most Holy Trinity is simply a matter of faith, and appears only in the light of a speculative truth, having no real bearing upon the inner life of the soul. But in reality the life of every Christian, even if he does not advert to the fact, is all

interwoven, so to say, with the very life of God, with the three Divine Persons. The Christian is assumed into the very life of God, and the life of God is actually lived in a special manner in the Christian himself.

Now the mystic is he who, moved by the grace of God, adverts to these wondrous facts, is made conscious of them, and finds his delight therein. Let us try to understand this.

God, we know by the united testimony of reason and revelation, is His own dwelling place. He is to Himself an inexhaustible fountain of purest bliss, ever flowing within Himself. He is His own life; deep, hidden, never going out of itself for its nourishment; naturally unapproachable, and naturally incommunicable to the creature. God is to Himself all in all. He is that, or He would not be the Absolute Good, He would not be God.

What are the acts of His divine life? What are, so to say, its pulsations? They are these two, to know and to love; but to know and to love what? Evidently His own divine Self. Now, faith tells us that in the very act of God contemplating Himself, there is formed in God an image of Him, living, substantial, perfectly like its original, a second Person, inducing between the two the relation of Father and Son. Further, we are informed that in the act of mutual complacency which cannot fail to spring up between these first two infinitely lovable persons, there is formed in God a Third Person, His Spirit, the substantial love of the Father and of the Son, the Holy Ghost: which com-

pletes the circle of the Divine Life and makes it perfect.

If God made a world of angels and men together with this splendid material universe, it is not that they add the tiniest drop to His full measure of bliss in Himself, but simply that He has willed angels and men to share in that bliss which is all His own, to drink with Him eternally and be inebriated, in that limitless ocean of Absolute Good that is Himself; and by a wonderful privilege, not at all due to the creature, to be made partakers of His own Divine Life. As the three Divine Persons of the Godhead are infinitely involved in the existence of one another, so it seems that they have willed that we be also involved in them and they in us. The whole economy of the supernatural order is planned and worked out to this end.

The first step towards carrying out such a design, was for God to make angels and men naturally to His own image and likeness; for thus only could He love us, no object without likeness to Him being worthy of God's complacency. Thus, what God loves in us is what He has put there of His own Divine Self: His image and likeness, our natural capacity to know Him and to love Him, and besides, in the supernatural order, the manifold wondrous gifts of His grace. And in proportion as we allow God to make us, through grace, more and more like Him, and know Him and love Him more and more, in that same proportion does He also love us and communicate to us more and more His own sanctity and bliss.

Thus, even in our present condition of trial under sin (we being a fallen race) we may begin by faith to know God as He is, that is to say, as one God in three Divine Persons, and to love Him, though alas! so inadequately; pending the time soon to come, when, if we have been faithful, we shall see Him face to face and love Him at last perfectly, sharing His essential bliss in Himself, without let or hindrance. We may, even now, through prayer and the Sacraments, be brought, under the veil of faith, into intimate relations with each one of the Divine Persons.

The grateful, lively recognition of all these things by the Christian, makes him a mystic. Oh! with what rapture does he then pay distinct and special attention to each of the three Divine Persons: to the Father Who so loved him as to give him His only Son, to the Son Who so loved him as to make Himself his Brother and Redeemer, to the Holy Ghost Who so loves him as to constitute Himself his perpetual Guest, his actual and everlasting possession? Yes, says the mystic, to build me up into the greater likeness of God now, and later on to admit me to His glory, it takes no less than the three Divine Persons, and moreover my willing co-operation.

Thus consciously to co-operate with God, to work with the three Divine Persons: to become sensible of God's building one upon, or rather into, His own Divine Essence, is mystical life. Through the operations of grace God lives in a special manner within us. These operations are the vivid pulsations of His own Divine Life; and through holy contemplation, the mystic becomes

an enamoured witness of so unspeakable a mystery.

People talk sometimes of the exercise of the presence of God; to the true mystic there is no exercise there. To remember God and live with Him does not cost him an effort. To him, the Most Holy Trinity is the great fact before which all else pales into insignificance. To him, the Blessed Trinity is the great reality, which he meets constantly, which produces and fills and sustains and lights up and beautifies everything, and overflows everywhere infinitely. The mystic sees the whole world as a tiny thing in one ray of the glory of the triune God.

The Most Holy Trinity is the promised land of mystical life. In this regard, there happens spiritually to the mystic all that happened to the Hebrews when they went out of Egypt. The passage of the Red Sea is a good general confession, which drowns, in the waves of the Blood of Jesus Christ, all the proud army of Pharao, chariots and horsemen, vices and mortal sins: all buried, never to rise again! Then one enters into the desert, that is, the world begins to appear quite empty and barren, and life in it no better than an aimless roaming about. Soon, however, one receives the Law of Love on two tables, though still experiencing the mutinies of the flesh—for, whilst the spirit is with God on the Mountain of contemplation, the inferior part murmurs and rebels and has to be sternly rebuked—the ways of Purity and of Illumination. Finally, after a more or less protracted roaming about and moving from camp to camp, one

passes the Jordan miraculously and takes possession of the promised land of the conscious, felt, relished presence of God: this happens when, through an inestimable special grace of God, one is moved definitely to bid an adieu to all things created, that one may live to God alone.

Then not only does the mystic live to God, but he dwells in God; the Blessed Trinity becomes his dwelling place. To the vivid, conscious faith of that man, the Divine Essence unseen becomes the very place of his abode during the rest of his earthly life.

Now, the Blessed Trinity, in which the mystic thus lives consciously, proves to him sometimes a very paradise of delights: that is when he is given to taste how sweet God is; then again, at other times, the Blessed Trinity becomes to him a very Purgatory, that is when the scorching rays of the intolerable sanctity and justice of God are made to shine full upon him, to burn away the rust of his sins and imperfections. Be this as it may, that man does not dwell in himself, nor in the creatures of this world, he dwells in God, the Most Holy Trinity, to Whom be glory for ever!

CHAPTER VIII

HOW GOD THE FATHER MAKES HIMSELF THE PRIME-MOVER OF THE MYSTICAL LIFE

NOW we must proceed to consider separately and in detail the special, distinct and active relations which each of the Divine Persons deigns to assume towards the child of grace, the Christian: bearing in mind that mystical life consists in the lively apprehension by the Christian of these relations between God and him, together with an active correspondence on his part to the several distinct operations of the Divine Persons. As we go on, the marvel of our supernatural union with God will at almost every step appear more and more startling.

In this chapter I want to show what special active function God the Father deigns to appropriate to Himself in regard to the Christian, and how the mystic is made to realize it plainly by a sort of inward experimental feeling. It is all summed up in the words of St. John: *Behold what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called, and should be the sons of God* (1 John iii, 1), and in these other words of St. Paul: *For the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit that we are the sons of God* (Rom. viii, 16).

To the unspiritual, God the Father is almost a stranger, seen, as it were, at an immense distance, too far away altogether for much notice; Our Lord seems, of course, a good deal nearer, and perhaps the only Divine Person to Whom he has somehow a direct, immediate relation; whilst the Holy Ghost is really nowhere perceived. How grossly erroneous such a view is will soon appear.

First of all, let us observe that God the Father who is the principle of all *in divinis* (inside the Divine Essence) is thereby also necessarily the principle of all *extra divina* (outside the Divine Essence), whence it follows that He is therefore also the very first principle of our mystical life, the very prime mover of it. Consequently, as one trained in the logic of the Schoolmen will readily admit, God the Father is absolutely the very first object the mystic ought to keep in view, and the one he ought to strain every nerve to attain to, and the one he will certainly attain to in the end. Therefore God the Father, Who is the prime mover, and because He is the prime mover, is also the last end of our mystical life.

I go to the Father (John xiv, 12) said Our Lord, speaking of the consummation of His earthly life. "I go to the Father," may the mystic truly say, speaking of the whole process and final consummation of his spiritual life. *Be you therefore perfect as also your heavenly Father is perfect,* Our Lord tells us, as if to say: Understand that the whole gist and purpose of the supernatural order is to bring you to the Father: to make you first, as far as your

created capacity admits, good like Him, holy like Him, nay, even rich like Him in the possession of His Son and His Holy Spirit; pending the time when He will crown all His gifts by giving Himself also to you, making you thereby even happy like Him. There you have the perfect circle, the whole evolution of mystical life.

So the Christian, or more strictly, the mystic, is a man who goes to the Father.

But how does he go to the Father, and how does the Father meet him and receive him?

Even as a son!

The mystic goes to the Father even as a son, because God the Father has made him a son, and treats him as such, and will ultimately receive him in heaven as a son. This we must now try to express more fully.

When a man is baptized, what happens?

That man, who a few hours or days, or perhaps years previously, was born of an earthly father and mother, into a fallen race, the great human family, with an ancestral curse or blight upon his soul, with his purely natural faculties not even whole and unimpaired, to a life of many miseries to be followed by death, in this lower natural world—that man is, by virtue of the Sacrament and the operation of the Holy Ghost (*ex aquâ et Spiritu sancto* (John iii, 5)), born again, begotten of God (*ex Deo nati sunt* (John i, 13)). He has been cleansed from original sin and, if he is an adult, of all his personal ones; he is now grafted upon the true vine, the natural Son of God, Our Lord Jesus Christ (*Ego vitis, vos palmites* (John xv, 5)); he is given a share of

the Divine Nature (*divinæ consortes naturæ* (2 Pet. i, 4)) filled with the Holy Spirit, assumed into the great family of the Saints (*cives sanctorum et domestici Dei, superædificati super fundamentum Apostolorum et Prophetarum* (Eph. ii, 19, 20)); he is marked in the very substance of his soul with an indelible character of supernatural resemblance, endowed with the new faculties of Faith, Hope and Charity which illumine the darkness of his natural intellect and strengthen the weakness of his natural will; enriched with the infusion of all moral virtues, further enriched through the seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost with a perennial well of special graces springing up in his very soul to refresh it and make it fruitful unto life everlasting (*Fiet in eo fons aquæ salientis in vitam æternam* (John iv, 14)); all these things, in view of his ultimately being granted the essential Beatific Vision, though by strict right it is the exclusive privilege of God alone.

Here is a something altogether new, a new being: he who was before a natural man is now supernaturally changed into a very son of God.

His sonship of God is not as was his sonship from his earthly parents, *in perfectam similitudinem naturæ*, making him of the same nature: that is impossible, from the fact of his being a creature, and therefore finite, and therefore incapable of the full communication of the Divine likeness. Nor is he made a son of God as the Divine Word, by a natural, substantial and necessary process; no, his sonship is by way of adoption, accidental and gratuitous (*volun-*

tarie genuit nos (Jas. i, 18)), and therefore infinitely inferior to the Sonship of the Divine Word. Yet, even when these limitations have been duly affirmed, our state appears all magnificent and a true participation of the sonship of the second Person of the Blessed Trinity. St. Augustine (in Ps. 26, Enarr. ii, 2) distinctly says that we are " divinely associated to the mystery of the eternal generation." God the Father, eternal and natural Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, adopts also the Christian as his own very son, makes him also heir to His Kingdom, really and truly co-heir with His natural, Divine Son, even as though that man had been born of His own Divine Substance, and had had the same natural rights as His Son consubstantial with Him.

Once the child is born, he must grow and wax strong and become a man, and do man's work. For this purpose he must be fed, which care naturally devolves upon the parent. We know in what a tender, touching way that is done in nature, whilst the child is yet little; the mother giving the breast to her little one and letting him draw his nourishment from her own substance. Then as he grows and waxes strong, he is weaned from the breast, and other nourishment proper to his age is given him: bread and meat from the inexhaustible store of kindly nature, so that in time he may be relied upon to do a man's work.

In the order of grace, it is God the Father Who takes upon Himself to attend to the feeding of the Christian, according to the stage of

his spiritual growth. He says (in Is. lxvi, 12): *You shall be carried at the breasts and upon the knees they shall caress you.* And (in Ps. lxxx, 11): *I am the Lord thy God, Who brought thee out of the land of Egypt. Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.* The mystic, that fledgling of Divine love, does open his mouth wide, shows himself insatiable of God, crying incessantly for more food, and the Heavenly Father, as a loving Pelican, fills him constantly with more and more from his Divine life and substance.

For we must observe here that, though the Christian, when made son of God, is not born of the Divine Substance (this being the exclusive privilege of the Only natural Son, the Word of God) he is nevertheless fed with the Divine Substance.

We are commanded to pray thus: *Our Father . . . give us this day our supersubstantial bread.* (Mat. vi, 11). The Christian calls for a kind of food which God the Father is to draw from His own Divine substance, for a bread made from the kneading together of these two elements: His own Divine Word, and His own Substantial Love; and in answer to the prayer, God the Father, by a marvellous secret operation, begets his Divine Son in that man, and through His Divine Son, produces in that man, by a special presence of love, His Holy Spirit also.* That man will therefore be able to do the work of a

* It is not a question here, as is obvious, of the Holy Eucharist; we shall come to that in due course; but it may be as well to note here that each of the three Divine Persons has His own way of contributing to the growth of the child of grace. I am in this chapter stating the way of God the Father

Christian, and show himself a worthy son of God the Father.

It is now plain that the whole supernatural life consists in receiving from the Father and in duly giving back to the Father. Receiving what? His Divine Son and His Holy Spirit. And giving back to Him what? A son, another Jesus, our very self made one with the Son, and actuated by the Holy Ghost, *For, whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God* (Rom. viii, 14). *That you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven,* says Our Lord, when He enjoins upon us the most heroic acts of charity in the love of our enemies; acts which cannot be performed by man except with the powerful help of the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

Now, perhaps, we begin to perceive something of what passes between the mystic and God the Father. Marvellous to relate, the Heavenly Father, on His part, brings into the life lived in common with the child of His love, the Christian, all that is His own, namely His very Self, Who is the Well-Spring of the Godhead, and His Divine Son, and His Holy Spirit: keeping nothing back; only it is all under the veil of faith, as man, in his present condition, would be unable to bear the sight of the splendour of God thus investing him. And the mystic on his part brings into this life, lived in common with the Heavenly Father, his whole self. It is little enough; and who is more keenly alive to that fact than the mystic himself? But it is all he has. His whole self, body and soul and faculties high and low: the whole tree, root and branch,

with all its actual production of fruits, and possibilities and promises for the future. God the Father, natural Father of the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, constitutes Himself by an act of His Will, Father also of the Christian, impressing on the substance of his soul a special sign of supernatural resemblance, actively begetting him to the Divine Life; and the Christian, on his part, when he is a mystic, actually, actively, consciously and constantly takes God the Father for his own Father, and endeavours to reproduce and to prolong in his whole life and in all his acts the very Sonship of the Divine Word, to Whom he is so lovingly associated.

For, there is this remarkable thing about it all, that whereas the son of a man cannot increase his sonship, any more than he could have chosen his earthly father, the child of grace, on the contrary, can always and freely choose God for his Father, and it is in his power at every moment effectually to increase his sonship.

Now, the mystic does this, all the time, more and more, and with what delight! But is it really the mystic who does it? Is it not rather God the Father Who operates in him the *velle et perficere* of his sonship? Truth to tell, it is both together, God and the mystic, by their joint action.

And whereas, through natural generation man receives from his parents only a life like theirs, but not their own; a life numerically distinct from theirs, separate and independent: the Christian through his supernatural generation receives a life which is not distinct, nor separated

from, nor independent of, the Divine life as it is lived in the heavenly Father; it is identical with the Divine life, numerically one with it; it is that self-same Divine life, as much as the narrow limits of man's being and the play of his free will allow it to make irruption into him.

During his earthly pilgrimage, then, the mystic endeavours to reproduce in himself as much as is possible to so limited a being the sanctity, goodness, love and all perfection of the Heavenly Father, even as does the Divine Word in Him, even as did in His earthly life the Word made Man, Our Lord Jesus Christ. So his delight, his very food, is to do his Father's will. As a loving, dutiful son, he works diligently at the part of his Father's vineyard assigned to him by his state of life, and by the providential course of events. *I must be about the things that are my Father's*, he constantly says to himself, and to those around him, and, for that matter, to the whole world. On the other hand, day by day, God the Father transforms the mystic gradually into the likeness of His Divine Son; more and more He takes possession, by the agency of the Holy Ghost, of all the faculties of that man, to make him perform wonderful acts of edification in the Church, and produce as a branch of the true Vine, fruits worthy of eternal life; and ever *He will purge it forth that it may bring more fruit* (John xv, 2).

Such, feebly described, are the mutual relations of God the Father and the mystic.

One last thing to note in this matter is that God the Father, though so loving and generous

in His dealings with the mystic, does not as yet give Himself to him as an object of direct, immediate enjoyment. He gives us His divine Son and His Holy Spirit to be enjoyed by us now, under the veil of faith, but He reserves for us the enjoyment of Himself, as the supreme gift in the land of the Blessed. It was no doubt in allusion to this fact that St. Aloysius Gonzaga, in his last illness, wrote, with characteristic insight: "It cannot be long before I go to receive the embraces of the Eternal Father, in whose bosom I hope to find secure and everlasting rest."

CHAPTER IX

THE BEATIFIC VISION THE END OF THE WHOLE SUPERNATURAL ORDER

Si filii, et hæredes.
And if sons, heirs also (Rom. viii, 17).

AS the souls of the just, before Christ, were received into Abraham's bosom and dwelt there in the serenity of peace, joyfully looking forward to the coming of Our Lord and their own transference to heaven; so also, in much the same manner, the mystic lives consciously with the Son of God and the Holy Ghost and all the children of God, known and unknown, visible and invisible, in the bosom of the Father, *of whom are all things, and we unto Him* (I Cor. viii, 6). The mystic dwells there contentedly, lovingly and consciously, though still in the darkness of his present condition, awaiting the coming of the Bridegroom, and the lifting up of the veil, and the grand revelation of the Father. "*Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us*," said Philip, with more pregnant truth than he was aware.

Now we know that the whole Christian life is ordained to one end, the enjoyment of the Beatific Vision by predestined man. Everything in the economy of Providence is for the further-

ing of that sublime design of God. The whole supernatural order of grace is for the purpose of making man both worthy and capable of the Beatific Vision. It will therefore enable us the better to understand those means of grace of which we shall later speak at length—Prayer, the Sacraments and all the details of mystical life, as well as the great works of God *ad extra*, Creation, the missions of the Son and the Holy Ghost, Redemption by the Cross, the mystery of Holy Church—if we take here and now a proper view of the end itself of all, which is none other than the Beatific Vision.

What, then, is the Beatific Vision? In what does it precisely consist? What does it mean, and what does it imply? Let us proceed slowly, cautiously, gradually, and weigh every word in such a difficult, and at the same time, entrancing subject.

The Beatific Vision is the vision of God. But what sort of vision? The vision of God even as He is; the vision of God even as God Himself enjoys it; the vision of God as He granted it to His blessed Angels immediately after their trial. The vision, the vivid perception, the real taking in of the Absolute Good, that is to say, of all beauty, sanctity, loveliness and other infinite perfections as they are in God. *I will show thee all good*, says He to Moses (Exod. xxxiii, 19).

It is called Beatific, because God being the Absolute Good, the effect of such a vision is to make absolutely happy, as well as unfailingly good, whosoever enjoys it.

Beatific Vision is the popular appellation.

Now, if we attend chiefly to the manner of it, we should describe it as a sort of direct, immediate vision of God, without any go-between, without anything intervening, whether as an obstacle or as a help. Nothing can help one to see God as He is in Himself. Beatific Vision is not in the soul by way of representation or image as are the things of this world in our senses and imagination and in our intellect; there can be no image of the Infinite. It is a direct intuition of God, hence its other name, "Intuitive Vision."

But it would certainly be more satisfactory to a philosophical mind to call it by a name describing its very nature rather than its manner or its effect: this would be the "Essential Vision," because this expression really tells of what it consists, namely, the perception of God by means of His very essence; or, in other words, in the union of the very essence of God with him who perceives it. Thus we see that the Beatific Vision will be a more intimate and lively process than our vision of the natural world, of scenery, of a person, or of any material object before our eyes; because such a vision of natural objects is made only through an image of these being formed within us, and not through an immediate union of them with us, whilst on the contrary, the Beatific Vision is caused through nothing but an immediate union of the Divine Essence within the beholder of it. The Beatific Vision, then, will not be a dead thing, merely spectacular and outside us, as the Universe is, and with the distant, unsympathetic coldness of nature; it will be a grand, living, personal fact,

throbbing in us as our human heart, taking hold of our whole being, inside and out, knitting itself with every fibre of our soul and body and making us one with God.

It is obvious that God alone has a natural right and aptitude to the Beatific Vision. It is identical with Himself. It is all His own; His property, His personal good, His naturally unalienable and unapproachable privilege, His fenced round and sealed Kingdom of bliss and glory. Neither man, nor highest angel, nor yet any other more exalted being that God might create, could lay claim to the Beatific Vision or be naturally capable of It. The Beatific Vision, as it is in God, as it is experienced by God, is one and the same thing with God Himself, one and the same thing with His very life, with His Divine operations *ad intra.* and the Trinity of His persons. To speak in a human way, it is consequent upon, or rather concurrent with, the vision or perception of His infinite goodness that God utters His Word: a true, living, perfect, infinite expression of His very self; establishing between Him Who utters His Word and the Word which is uttered, the relations of Father and Son. And as both the Father and the Son have mutually the intuition of their infinite loveliness, they love each other with such a perfect, infinite, essential and substantial love, that it constitutes a Third Person in God, namely, the Holy Ghost; thus completing the cycle of the Divine life, and the fulness of the Beatific Vision as it is in God.

Now, what a stupendous condescension on the

part of God to have called His intelligent creatures, the angels first and then men, to share with Him the delights of the Beatific Vision! But, what a tremendous effort (again to speak in a human way) it must have required to raise the creature to a level with God Himself, especially in the case of man after the original fall! None can see God but God Himself; then man must be somehow made God, that is to say, must be raised to a divine state, constituted into a divine manner of being; the Divine Essence must be infused into him, and so penetrate his whole personality as to make of him in a way a wholly divine being: he must have the very life of God in him: then he will be capable of the Beatific Vision and have a right to it. A man in the state of grace, a new born infant just baptized, is capable of the Beatific Vision; in the words of St. John: *He hath eternal life abiding in him* (1 John iii, 15): that is to say, the very life of God. Thus it will be seen that "supernatural" does not only mean something above the level of created or creatable beings, but SOMETHING ON A LEVEL WITH GOD.

The effort necessary to this end on the part of God has been duly made, as is evidenced in the connected works of Creation, Incarnation, Redemption, the institution of the Church and the application through the seven Sacraments of the merits of Jesus Christ to all men of good will. Now, this mighty effort on the part of God calls for a corresponding strenuous effort on the part of man to co-operate with God: and that is made when a man lives the Christian life

in its utmost fulness, that is the mystical life as we are trying to describe it here. Christian life, then, is a sort of deification of man, is the making of man into God; and mystical life is, on the part of man, his really acting his God-like part.

Mystical life, by the attention rendered to God present everywhere, and in one's very self, and by the intense, if dim, perception of one's active relations with each of the three Divine Persons through the efficacy of the Sacraments, and by the laying of oneself more and more open to all the divine influences, and by a contemplation assiduous, keen and pure, of the divine perfections and the tasting, under the veil of faith, of the divine sweetness—mystical life, we say, is an apprenticeship to the Beatific Vision. Nothing short of that. Mystical life is a most fitting preparation of man for the Beatific Vision; a training and a raising up of all the faculties to the coming glory, a fusing of all his being into the Being of God; a foreshadowing of the Beatific Vision and a prelude to it.

With the Beatific Vision in prospect, the mystics of all ages and professions have found nothing too arduous, no apostolate too exacting, no martyrdom too cruel, no self-restraint too protracted, no desert or solitude too horrible, no humiliation too great, no service too low or repulsive. In all hardships and tribulations they go about repeating with the Apostle: *I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed in us* (Rom. viii, 18).

The mystic bears in mind that the degrees of

his Beatific Vision will be according to the degree of charity he has achieved whilst on earth; he considers that time is given him for no other purpose than to work up to his own rank in the grand hierarchy of perfect charity and divine happiness; and therefore he is very careful not to lose a single moment of time, not to let pass a single opportunity of enlarging his capacity of seeing and loving and enjoying God for evermore. Indeed, the measure of our state of grace when we die will be the measure of our *Lumen Gloriæ* or Light of Glory throughout Eternity.

Other words of St. Paul in the same Epistle to the Romans are to the point here. He says: "*For the expectation of the creature waiteth for the revelation of the sons of God*" (Rom. viii, 19). It seems as if the whole creation had been taken into the confidence of God and informed of what He had planned for man and was actually in a fever of expectation to see it accomplished. And why, if not because the whole material universe finds its perfection in man, and is raised in him to a share in the glory of supernatural life? Hence, the whole creation will, in a way, be thrilled with joy when man shall be admitted to the Beatific Vision, even as it is said that *the stars with cheerfulness have shined forth to Him that made them* (Baruc. iii, 35). It is clear that all this material universe which is without rational knowledge or free will has been made distinctly with a view to the bringing about of the Beatific Vision in man. It helps him in his ascent to the Beatific

Vision: it being itself destined, through him, in some way, to be assumed ultimately into the glory of the Beatific Vision on the day of the general Resurrection and last Judgment, when sea and land shall give up their dead, and then will take place the grand, public, solemn "*revelation of the sons of God*," and a new heaven and a new earth will be inaugurated. Then, indeed, we shall understand the full meaning of the words: ***And if sons, heirs also.***

CHAPTER X

THAT THE DIVINE WORD IS THE BRIDEGROOM

ONE of the most magnificent and explicit prophecies of the wonders of Christian life is set forth in Osee, ch. ii, 19-20 in these stupendous words: *And in that day I will espouse thee to me for ever, and I will espouse thee to me in justice and judgment, and in mercy and in commiserations. And I will espouse thee to me in faith, and thou shalt know that I am the Lord.*

But *the thoughts of mortal men are fearful* (Wisdom ix, 14), and this timidity of the thoughts of men appears especially in regard to this subject of the wedding of the Creator with His rational creature. Men dare not believe in this, the grandest reality of spiritual life. They would fain say to the writer or preacher who proclaims it: "Hold! How dare you say such a thing?" They are of opinion that the comparison of two human lovers in that most amazing relation of holy Matrimony, as a symbol of our union with God, goes beyond the actual truth and beyond the real thoughts of God, whilst on the contrary, if anything, it falls immeasurably short of expressing the strength and intimacy and tenderness of the mutual relation which God wishes to establish between Himself and the soul.

The *Canticle of Canticles* bears out this truth most vividly, but it does not tell us any more than the above passage of Osee, which of the three Divine Persons it is who speaks in the character of Bridegroom. It needed the fulness of the revelation of the New Testament to make us know that the Bridegroom is the second Person of the most Holy Trinity; that is, the Word of God. Now, indeed, with the light of the Gospel thrown upon the Canticle of Canticles and kindred passages in the Old Testament, how well, even their most mysterious expressions, are seen to fit the two natures in Jesus Christ, the events of His life and of His sacred Passion, His Eucharistic Sacrifice and Sacrament, and all His personal dealings with us in the secret mystical life!

Thus, St. John the Baptist calls Him *the Bridegroom* (John iii, 29), and compares his own mission of Precursor to that of a *paranumphos*, that friend of the bridegroom whose duty it was to watch at the door of the bridal chamber. Our Lord calls Himself the Bridegroom. To the disciples of John who were finding fault with His own disciples because they did not perform as many fasts as themselves or the Pharisees, He answers: *Can the children of the Bridegroom mourn, as long as the Bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the Bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they shall fast* (Matt. ix, 15). Again in Matt. xxiv, 44, he says: *Wherefore be you also ready, because at what hour you know not, the Son of man will come.* And in chap. xxv, 1:

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be like to ten virgins who, taking their lamps, went out to meet the Bridegroom. In the Apocalypse, where so many marvellous, mysterious things are revealed to us about the Lamb, He is given, not expressly but by the most natural of implications, His title of Bridegroom (Apoc. ch. xxi and xxii). It is a page of surpassing beauty. *And I, John, saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. . . . And there came one of the seven angels, and spoke with me, saying: Come, and I will show thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb. . . . And the Lord God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must be done shortly, and* (he said): *Behold I come quickly. And the spirit and the bride say: Come. And he that heareth, let him say: Come. . . . He that giveth testimony of these things saith: Surely I come quickly; Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!*

Truth to tell, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity sustains towards the Christian what may seem at first sight a bewildering multiplicity of relations. The Word of God has made Himself our blood relation, our true brother, by assuming our human nature. He has made Himself our pattern and our teacher in His life and Gospel doctrine, and our Saviour by dying on the Cross. Then, through Baptism, He has made the Christian His living member, in His mystical body the Church, of which He is the Head Furthermore, He makes Himself

our very food in Holy Communion, whilst, in the other Sacraments, He anoints and consecrates and sanctifies the Christian's body and soul with His Holy Spirit and the virtue of His own merits, for most special and accurately determined spiritual purposes. In Confirmation, the Son of God makes us His soldiers, and therefore constitutes Himself our captain. In the Sacrament of Penance He binds our wounds after having poured into them His very Blood as a healing remedy. In Holy Orders He communicates His own Priestly office and character to some of the brethren. In Matrimony He makes the human husband and wife to be the very image of Himself in His loving relation to the Church. Finally in Extreme Unction and Holy Viaticum He constitutes Himself the helper and the conqueror of the soul in its supreme struggle at the hour of death.

Now, we must understand that all these personal favours, lavished upon us by the Son of God, are nothing else than His espousing of us unto Himself for time and eternity. All the other titles and offices which the Word of God made man assumes in relation to us, are finally resolved into the one great title, our Heavenly Bridegroom. He is our King, our Shepherd, our Way, our good Samaritan, our Light, our Resurrection and Life; New Adam, Lord, the Lamb that was slain, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Conqueror that came to conquer, the Vine, the Wine-presser, our Propitiation, our Advocate, our Reconciliation, our Peace, our Joy, our Reward, the Corner Stone and very

Foundation of all the order of things natural and supernatural; the Alpha and Omega of the world's history, as well as of every individual soul's history; our Companion on the way, in the pilgrimage of life; the Morning Star, the Living Bread, the Sun, the Fountain, a Giant, a Friend, a Witness, High Priest, Altar and Victim, Bishop of our souls, Father of the world to come, Pontiff of the future bliss; Judge of the Living and the Dead; the eternal reward of the good, and the eternal Torment of the wicked; He is all this, yet it is all comprised in this one, exclusive relationship of His with us, namely, that He is our HEAVENLY BRIDEGROOM.

His most precious Humanity in all its mysteries from His Incarnation to His death on the Cross, and from that to His last coming for Judgment; and in all its states, especially that of His Eucharistic Presence; His whole sacred Humanity, I say, is in a manner the Sacrament, the sign, the sensible token and the very means of our bridal union; but it is truly the Godhead of the Word, the eternal, infinite, glorious Son of God, Who is the Bridegroom; whilst man, without distinction of sex, for here *caro non prodest quidquam: the flesh profiteth nothing* (John vi, 64), man who by himself is a weak and barren nature in regard to things heavenly, man is the bride of that divine marriage, which is not of the flesh but of the spirit; man is the bride of that formidable Lover, the eternal Son of God! A very disproportionate union indeed, but one wherein an ineffable love fills the gap and levels the highest to the lowest, and raises

our nothingness to a share in His very sanctity and beauty and capacity for reciprocal love and eternal, divine life.

Our relationship of sons to the heavenly Father, full of divine sweetness as it is, is not unmixed with awe: we cannot allow ourselves to forget the infinite distance that separates our puny selves from the overwhelming majesty and sanctity of God. But with God the Son made Man, our relations are entirely made up of sweetness, if only we look at them in their true light. There is, or there ought to be, no feeling of awe between brother and brother, still less between the members of the body and their head, still less, if possible, between the bride and her bridegroom. There ought to be between them only feelings of the most strong and tender and delicate mutual love. But in order to enter fully into such feelings, one must needs be very watchful over one's sacred relations with the Son of God; one must needs be a mystic.

The Bridegroom is the Word of God: need we, then, insist on this particular and proper aspect of our marriage with Him, namely, that it is wholly spiritual and of the spirit? Whatever, therefore, is boldly borrowed in the Canticle of Canticles and other parts of Holy Writ from the demonstrations of love as between a human bride and her human spouse, is to be interpreted wholly in a spiritual sense. He has already espoused to Himself the higher rational creatures, the blessed Angels, and He is now bent upon espousing all men of good will. And it is the office of mystical life to make us atten-

tive to that espousing of our soul by the Son of God, and to excite us to render, even now, whilst yet on earth, love for love, to this our Heavenly Bridegroom.

The wedding is begun on earth, to be consummated in heaven. It is during the present life that the two lovers, the Son of God and the Christian, plight their faith to one another, and the Bridegroom begins even now to take and to give kisses of love in the passing visits of Holy Communion. Holy Communion is not only the feeding of the child of God, the Christian; it is especially an act of his wedded life with Christ. It is on the part of the Son of God a taking possession of the body and soul of his little bride and a giving to her of her marital rights over Himself. *They two will be one flesh* has been said of the husband and wife according to nature: at Holy Communion we are made one with Christ, so marvellously, so far beyond what poor human marriage can ever dream of! The Divine Bridegroom has placed His infinite power at the service of His love, so that we can say with absolute truth the words of the Canticle of Canticles: *My Beloved to me and I to Him, who feedeth among the lilies* (Cant. ii, 16). It is true the little bride cannot as yet see the face of her Beloved, nor feel his embrace all the time, though He is all the time near her in the Blessed Sacrament; she cannot at present see the Son of God in His majesty and loveliness and call Him "Husband" before all the Angels and Saints and the Heavenly Father; these things are not for our present condition of mortality: they

are the privilege of the coming eternity. Patience! patience! *Till the day breaks and the shadows retire* (Cant. ii, 17).

In the meanwhile, if we cannot enjoy our heavenly Bridegroom to the full extent of our desire, we must at least be eager to embrace Him as often and as lovingly as we can in Holy Communion, under the veil of faith and of the sacred species; and we must employ the time of our exile in making ourselves more and more worthy of Him. Does not a king's bride try to adorn herself for him who will soon come and claim her for his wedded wife before all his court? Now, that is precisely the work of the mystic life, thus to adorn the soul, to enlarge her capacity of loving God more and more, to exercise her beforehand in the good manners of the court of heaven, where she is so soon to appear as the bride and wedded wife of the King.

I Jesus, have sent my angel, to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the root and stock of David, the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the Bride say: Come. And he that heareth, let him say: Come. And he that thirsteth, let him come: and he that will, let him take the water of life, freely (Apoc. xxii, 16-17).

CHAPTER XI

THE PART SUSTAINED BY THE SACRED HUMANITY IN OUR MYSTICAL LIFE

THE mystic can be considered under two aspects: that of a mere person, and that of the member of a society. All we have said up to this, refers to man considered individually. Now, we cannot continue to view him only as such. We cannot go on looking solely at the relations of each of the Divine Persons with the mystic as an individual. The Christian is not isolated any more in his spiritual than in his physical life. He is a member of a society of which Jesus Christ is the Head; he is one particular stone out of a structure of which Jesus Christ is the very foundation; he is a branch of a tree of which Jesus Christ is the stem. And through Jesus Christ to Whom he is united, the Christian finds himself united also to all those who cling to Jesus Christ. *So we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another* (Rom. xii, 5).

For, not only has the Son of God assumed to Himself, when He came into our world, a human body, which is His own, and which, together with His human soul, constitutes the Sacred Humanity; but He is moreover, assuming another body, a collective, a mystic one,

of which all Christians are members; another body which clings to the physical body of Christ, which is made one with it, and thereby made one also with the Divine Person of the Son of God. In other words: the mystery of the Incarnation, after having taken place in the Sacred Humanity of Our Lord, is, by the very virtue of the Flesh and Blood of Jesus extended, in a way, to all Christians.

A Christian is, together with all his brethren, an offshoot of the Incarnation, a branch of the mighty tree which has sprung from the open side of Jesus dead on the Cross, he is one of the multitudinous grains of wheat which owe their origin to the death and burial of the Saviour: *Amen I say to you, unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground, dieth, itself remaineth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit* (John xii, 24-25).

This important truth gives us a deeper insight into the mysteries of the mystical life. The Bridegroom of the Christian soul, as we have seen in the foregoing chapter, is the Word of God, the Son of God, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity. Therefore, the Sacred Humanity of Our Lord, as distinct from His Divine nature, is not the Bridegroom; nay, it is the very first Bride which the Word of God espoused, and it is from this marriage of the Word of God with the Sacred Humanity which was consummated by the mystery of the Incarnation that we are born. *Ex Deo nati sunt*, says St. John (i, 13).

This is to be understood not only of the

redeemed, that is to say, of mere men, but also of the blessed Angels who needed no redemption, and also of the Queen of Angels and men, the Blessed Virgin, who was to be the very mother of Jesus according to the flesh only after the course of many centuries, but who in the great plan of God, and by the foreseen merits of her Divine Son, was the true *primogenita*, the first fruit of the Divine Marriage. *The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways. . . . I was set up from eternity. . . . Before the hills I was brought forth* (Prov. viii, 22, 23, 25).

The Bull of Pius IX, proclaiming the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, applies these words of Holy Writ to Mary and asserts that not only was she redeemed *excellentiori modo* before the fall of Adam and Eve, but that she was conceived in the mind of God, and born to an unapproachable height of sanctity, before even the dawn of creation, before the creation and probation of the Nine Choirs of Angels.

We come here upon mysteries which baffle ordinary speech and the narrow concepts of the human mind, as they transcend the common sequence of things purely natural. We must bear in mind that the great Operator of these mysteries is God, the absolute Lord of all, who is infinitely above time, space and all conditions of created beings. From this transcendental point of view, we shall have no difficulty in realizing that, in the plan of God, though not in the order of execution: first, the Sacred Humanity is the first Bride of the Son of God; secondly,

the Blessed Virgin Mary, the first fruit of the Divine Marriage, is the second bride of the Son of God; thirdly, only after Holy Mary, and in strict subordination both to the Sacred Humanity and to Mary, all the blessed angelic natures are also the brides of the Son of God. Fourthly, all the members of the human race, from Adam down to the last man created, all men, as they come in their millions, generation after generation, may become brides of the Son of God; all are desired, nay, commanded, so to become.

The Christian, of either sex, becomes the Eve of this new Adam, the Son of God made Man: first formed out of His side when He was in the deep sleep of death on the Cross, the fruit of His merits.

Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh (Gen. ii, 23), presented to him by His Father as a bride, for the love of whom He left His house of glory, and whom He will cherish with the most tender and delicate affection.

The case of the blessed Angels is somewhat different from that of man, in that they needed no redemption. It is true that when St. John tells us that *gratia . . . per Jesum Christum facta est* (John i, 17), we must understand that the whole order of grace, as well for Angels as for men, is founded on Our Lord Jesus Christ; on His Sacred Humanity; that is to say, on the anticipated merits of the Incarnate Son of God. The first grace of the Angels, that of their creation in a supernatural state of knowledge and love of God, was absolutely gratuitous, so far as the Angels themselves were concerned,

but it was not quite so on the part of God, as the giver of that grace. With God, the first grace of the Angels was paid for. By whom? By the Son of God. With what? With the anticipated merits of His Incarnation. With the same coin was also bought and paid for the grace of final perseverance for all the Angels, so that they could all have attained to glory if they had wished to. At this point they were called upon, each one individually, to do their own part in accepting the grace that was offered them, and in co-operating with it. It was left to them to do this or not; they were free, so as to have the merit or the full responsibility of their own act with all its momentous consequences.

The greater part of the Angels chose to adhere to God, to make themselves one with the Son of God, by appropriating to themselves the supernatural merits of His Incarnation, and thereby deserving to become His wedded brides for ever. The others freely chose to keep aloof from the loving advances of God. They refused the grace of final perseverance and even put off the first grace with which they had been invested. They were not pleased with the supernatural order as it was revealed to them. They were so much in love with their natural excellence and priority, that they preferred to forego the supernatural gifts of grace and glory rather than lose their first rank, and acknowledge the Sovereignty of the Sacred Humanity of Our Lord, and the superiority of His blessed Mother and some of the greatest Saints. Thus, through pride, they became the first renegades from the love of God,

banishing themselves from His Kingdom and plunging themselves headlong into eternal ruin.

Thus it appears that all who are or ever shall be raised to the supernatural state of grace or glory, be they angels or be they men, owe this to the Sacred Humanity of Our Lord. The blessed Angels are not only the servants of the Incarnation, but its debtors as well: they owe everything to it, they are linked to this mystery from the very beginning of their existence; nay, from all eternity, in the mind of God, they are involved in its scheme.

One more very remarkable consequence of the mystery of this union is that, as the blessed Angels are united among themselves, and to the Son of God, and to the most Holy Trinity, through the Sacred Humanity of Our Lord, so also are we on earth already united to the blessed Angels and made one Church with them, through the same Sacred Humanity of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

St. Thomas assigns to the Sacred Humanity of Our Lord its proper place, function and dignity when he calls it "Instrumentum conjunctum Divinitatis," something not in itself the principal, but subordinate to a higher thing; an instrument, merely an instrument, but such an instrument as has been made one with Him who is using it; an instrument as personally united to the Son of God, as my hand or my arm is united to the rest of my physical being, or as my body is united to my soul and is its instrument for the purposes of physical life. An instrument which has the virtue of uniting all

the members of the mystical body of Christ, wherever they be and of whatsoever nature, and of uniting them to the Word of God and to the most Holy Trinity. Thus are we made partakers of the Divine Sonship and of the Divine life either of grace here below, or of glory in heaven.

Thus, therefore, there is a wonderful element intervening in the spiritual marriage of the intellectual creature with the Son of God, there is His Sacred Humanity. Whether Angels or men, all have to be incorporated into Him. His flesh and His blood, which He took from the Blessed Virgin Mary's womb, together with His Human Soul, these are the "cords of Adam" with which, centuries before His advent on earth, He predicted that He would draw us and bind us to Himself. *In funiculis Adam traham eos, in vinculis charitatis* (Osee. xi, 4). And the blessed Angels as well as men are caught up in those created meshes of uncreated love.

The mystic revels in the contemplation of these mysteries. He is filled with unspeakable joy at seeing himself an integral part of that marvellous world of grace and glory, and already in full communion with all its denizens, through Our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory for ever!

CHAPTER XII

HOW JESUS CRUCIFIED DRAWS ALL THINGS TO HIMSELF

Agnus in crucis levatur
Immolandus stipite,
Mite corpus perforatur,
Sanguis, unda profluit,
Terra, mundus, astra, pontus
Quo lavantur flumine.

CLAUDIAN MAMERTUS.

THIS most important section on the mystery of the Cross in relation to mystical life, for the sake of clearness, may be divided into three parts. In the first I strive to show the action of Jesus Crucified upon the world at large. In the second part I try to show the direct action of Jesus Crucified upon each individual soul. In the third part I call attention to some important conclusions which follow from this doctrine.

In the two preceding chapters we have been at pains to show that the special function assumed by the Second Person of the most Holy Trinity towards the mystic is that of Bridegroom, and that He unites us to His Divinity through His Humanity. Now, the last touch to this entrancing doctrine will be given, when we are made to perceive that it is in His Passion and Death, and not otherwise, that Our Lord

consummates this union of ourselves with Him for ever.

In other words, we have to realize that our Bridegroom is the Second Person of the most Holy Trinity, not simply as such, nor simply as Jesus, that is to say, as the Word made Flesh, but as JESUS CRUCIFIED. Our Bridegroom is the Lamb of God that has been slain for our sins. He is eternally the victim and the Priest of His own sacrifice, and He comes into our life for no other purpose than to make of each of us an oblation with Himself, of sweet odour to the Father, and He makes of all the Christians together "*a holy nation*" of which He is the High Priest for evermore (1 Pet. ii, 9).

It has pleased God to build the whole structure of the supernatural order upon the mystery of the Cross, upon that *Verbum crucis* of which St. Paul, the great exponent of this doctrine, speaks in his first Epistle to the Corinthians (i, 18), just as it has pleased God to build the whole edifice of the natural order in direct reference to the Sacred Humanity of Our Lord. Starting from the lowest forms of created existence and life, each successive species or series of species in concentric circles is a distinct step towards the final realization of *The Son of Man.* In just the same way, Jesus Crucified is the centre of absolutely all the works of God *ad extra.* The sacred Blood of Jesus tinges everything—men, the whole material universe, and even the angelic natures Several remarkable passages of Holy Scripture bear us out in this assertion.

In Ezechiel (ch. xlvii) we see the prophet, in

a vision, led by an angel to the gate of the Temple of Jerusalem, *and behold waters issued out from under the threshold . . . coming down to the right side of the temple, to the south part of the Altar, and* (the angel) *measured a thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters up to the ankles. And again he measured a thousand, and he brought me through the waters up to the knees. And he measured a thousand and he brought me through the waters up to the loins. And he measured a thousand and it was a torrent which I could not pass over: for the waters were risen so as to make a deep torrent which could not be passed over. . . . And behold on the banks of the torrent were very many trees on both sides, and he said to me: These waters that issue forth towards the hillocks of sand to the east and go down to the plains of the desert, shall go into the sea and shall go out, and the waters shall be healed. And every living creature that creepeth whithersoever the torrent shall come, shall live; and there shall be fishes in abundance after these waters shall have come thither, and they shall be healed, and all things shall live to which the torrent shall come. And the fishermen shall stand over these waters. . . . From Engaddi even to Engallim there shall be drying of nets. . . . But on the shore thereof and in the fenny places they shall not be healed, because they shall be turned into salt-pits. And by the torrent on the banks thereof, on both sides shall grow all trees that bear fruit; their leaf shall not fall off and their fruit shall not fail; every month shall they bring forth first*

fruits, because the fruits thereof shall be for food, and the leaves thereof for medicine. We know by the interpretation of Holy Church, that the spiritual meaning of this prophecy is about the far reaching and all embracing effects of the death of Our Lord on the Cross. The temple is the Body of Christ stretched on the Cross, at once a Temple, an Altar and a Victim of sacrifice. The torrent represents the flood of grace that issued forth from the pierced side of Our Lord, together with the water and Blood, and which grows wider and deeper as century succeeds century. The sea is the broad expanse of all nature. The fishermen are the members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy The fishes and creeping things are the souls of the just and sinners that will be saved. Engaddi and Engallim represent the whole earth from sunrise to sunset, or again the whole order of centuries to the very end of time. Those that are not healed but turned into salt-pits, barren of all vegetation and life, are the reprobates who would not avail themselves of this splendid redemption. Finally, the trees whose leaf shall not fall off and which every month shall yield choice fruit, are a symbol of the glory and bliss in store for us in heaven: thus showing that all the order of grace and glory is a direct, immediate outcome of the mystery of the Cross.

Striking as the above prophecy is, it is not more pregnant with meaning than the brief statement of Our Lord Himself: "*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to Myself*" (John xii, 32). I will draw all

things to Myself, that is, I will gather together and link to Myself on the Cross all the threads of past, present and future events. I will make of My immolation on the Cross the great central fact of all times, far exceeding the requirements for the mere redemption of fallen mankind, embracing in the mighty scheme the angels, not only the blessed ones, but also the fallen, and the reprobate souls, reaching out even from eternity unto eternity. Indeed, what other meaning are we to attribute to words like these of St. Paul: *It hath well pleased* (the Father) . . . *through him . . . to reconcile all things unto Himself, making peace through the Blood of His Cross, both as to the things that are on earth, and the things that are in heaven* (Col. i, 19, 20); or again: "*God, indeed, was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself* (2 Cor. v, 19). He does not say "the world of men" only, but simply the world, the whole world, the lower one and as well that of the angels, "of the things that are in heaven." Why did the world, the whole world, need to be reconciled? Because sin had made it hateful to God.

In the light of such passages, in their almost blinding refulgence, one may be justified in assuming that, had it not been for the foreknown atonement of the Son of God by His death on the Cross, God would not have created the world, with the perspective of sin as a corollary to the necessary gift of free will in the intellectual creature. God could not permit His work to be permanently marred by sin; rather

than that He would never have made the world. But now the act of obedience of His Divine Son unto death and unto the death of the Cross atoned superabundantly, first for the disobedience of the fallen angels and their perpetual state of rebellion as well as that of the reprobate souls that were to come afterwards, then for the original sin of Adam and Eve, finally for all the actual sins of men until the very end of the world. At the same time, Our Lord unites to His supreme act of obedience by His death on the Cross all the virtuous acts of His elect, both men and angels, either *in via* or *in patria*, those performed before as well as those performed after the time of His earthly life, making them all a victim of sweet odour to God with Himself, or rather, as St. Paul would express it, *in Himself*, for ever. In such a way does Our Lord fulfil His own prophecy: *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself* (John xii, 32).

Not to swell this chapter to undue proportions, I will content myself with referring the reader to the celebrated passage of St. Paul (Col. i, 12-20), and again (Phil. ii, 5-12), and kindred passages, and especially to the whole epistle to the Hebrews, all of which go to show that the mystery of the Cross reaches out infinitely beyond the mere redemption of men. I cannot, however, in this connection refrain from quoting a page of the Apocalypse which is of surpassing beauty and of transparent significance. In Chapter v, St. John is favoured with a vision of God seated on His throne in Heaven

and holding in His right hand a book written within and without, sealed with seven seals, and a strong angel cries out in a loud voice: Who is worthy to open the book and to loose the seals thereof? And as no man was able to open the book nor even to look on it, John wept bitterly. Then, one of the ancients said to him: *Weep not, behold the lion of the tribe of Juda, the root of David hath prevailed to open the book and to loose the seven seals thereof.* He proceeds then in these words: "*And I saw, and behold in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the ancients a* LAMB STANDING AS IT WERE SLAIN, *and he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat on the throne; and when he had opened the book the four living creatures and the four and twenty ancients fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints, and they sang a new canticle, saying: Thou art worthy, O Lord, to take the book and to open the seals thereof, because thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God in thy blood out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and hast made us to our God a kingdom and priests, and we shall reign on the earth. And I saw and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne . . . thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and divinity, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and benediction. And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under*

the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are therein, I heard all saying: To him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb, benediction, and honour, and glory, and power for ever and ever; and the four living creatures said: Amen! And the four and twenty ancients fell down on their faces, and adored him that liveth for ever and ever."

It would be difficult, in my humble opinion, more emphatically to give us to understand that all the mysteries of the works of God *ad extra*, gravitate around the central one of the Cross; and that, though the occasion of it was merely the fall of man and his redemption, yet, at the same time, the death of the Lamb of God consummates, and gives the final reason of, all God's dealings with men and angels and the material universe in time and eternity.

CHAPTER XIII

HOW JESUS CRUCIFIED ACTS UPON EACH INDIVIDUAL SOUL

Verbum crucis iis qui salvi fiunt Dei virtus est. The word of the cross . . . to them who are saved . . . is the power of God (1 Cor. i, 18).

TWO distinct actions of Our Lord are to be considered in the economy of Redemption:

First, the paying, by Our Lord, into the hands of God the Father, for all men *in globo*, nay, for all the world of angels and men, as well of the reprobate as of those that shall ever be saved. This we have seen in the preceding chapter.

Secondly, the personal application, by Our Lord Himself, of His plentiful Redemption, separately and individually, to each soul of good will, in particular. It is this which we are now to consider.

How does Our Lord find the means of coming to each one of us individually, to act upon each one of us individually, to unite each one of us, individually, to Himself, as the Lamb of God that was slain on the Cross? In other words, how are we made one with Jesus Crucified? How is such a thing made possible?

The difficulty lies in the fact of Our Lord Jesus Christ being Man. How can that Man,

Jesus Christ, *homo Christus Jesus,* Who is now in heaven, be able at the same time, to act upon all men and upon each man individually, in a direct, personal, immediate manner? Furthermore, how can He place us in actual, vivid contact with His sufferings and death on the Cross, which took place so many hundred years ago? Theologians answer that it is the hypostatic presence of the Godhead in the Body and Soul of Christ, which elevates the powers of Christ's humanity, natural and supernatural, to the point of being able to act upon all men and upon every one of them individually, in a direct, personal, immediate manner. It is not a figure of rhetoric to speak of our union with Christ, of a soul's dwelling in His wounds. It is the enunciation of an actual fact.

But (it may be objected) Jesus is not suffering and dying at this present moment, how can we be united with Him crucified? Is not this a sort of pious, hyperbolical expression? No, not in the least; it is the expression of as great a reality as any that can be thought of. Here again, theologians come to our help, and inform us that the divine personality of Our Lord lifts His Sacred Humanity out of the narrow limitations, not only of space, but of time as well. Jesus, when He was dying on the Cross, because He was a Divine Person, to Whom there was no distinction of past, present or future, to Whom all was an eternal present, was able, even as man, to seize and act upon everything and everyone, distinctly, separately and for his own sake, either before or after the actual taking place of His immolation,

at any distance of time, and in any possible number, because no created number of persons or things can exhaust the possibilities of a Divine Person. Thus it is that every individual man can really, through faith and the Sacraments, put himself in touch directly and personally with his Saviour dying on the Cross, and receive straight from His wounded side the water and Blood of his redemption.

This doctrine of an actual, immediate contact with Jesus Crucified because Jesus is a Divine Person, may well appear difficult to understand, subtle and metaphysical, for, truth to tell, so it is indeed. Not even all the genius of an Angelic Doctor could make it less difficult for the human mind to grasp. Few Christians have been able to express it satisfactorily, but, this notwithstanding, they all have a sort of instinctive or intuitive perception of it. Not only the great canonized Saints or learned Doctors of Theology, but many a humble follower of Christ, in the most lowly walks and conditions of life, finds it no difficulty to live and die with his Saviour Crucified, as though He were still on the Cross. The *Christo confixus sum cruci: With Christ I am nailed to the cross* (Gal. ii, 19) of St. Paul has a startling reality and actualness for them as well. They are by their faith and through the efficacy of the Sacraments made contemporaries of the Passion of Christ and actual sharers in it. These, one will perhaps say, are mystics. Very true; but then our contention is that every Christian is called upon thus to be a mystic, and finds precisely in the

treasure of his faith and of the Sacraments the means of being so.

Our Lord has found a way of bringing home to us this great truth of our union with Him crucified; I mean the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass with the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, whereby he who so wills may actually eat the flesh of the Lamb of God Who was slain on the Cross, and drink the Blood of His Redemption. *The Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread and, giving thanks, broke and said: Take ye and eat; this is My Body, which shall be delivered for you. This do for the commemoration of Me. In like manner also the chalice, after He had supped, saying: This chalice is the New Testament in My Blood, this do ye, as often as you shall drink, for the commemoration of Me. For, as often as you shall eat this bread and drink the chalice you shall show the death of the Lord until He come* (1 Cor. xi, 23-26).

Now, is not this marvellous? There is made at Holy Communion a personal application of the Body of Christ crucified to the mouth of the individual communicant, even we may say, as of the mother's breast to the mouth of her babe. Nay, this comparison of the mother with her infant does not cover our whole meaning; for with us there takes place, moreover, a transfusion of the whole Body and Blood of the Lamb of God into the communicant, through his open mouth, whilst the mother gives but a few drops of her milk. See there Jesus coming to you and acting upon you as the Victim of

the Sacrifice of the Cross. If you eat His Flesh and drink His Blood you shall have life "*in Him*"; you will thus be in direct, immediate and lively contact with the mystery of your Redemption. He comes to you in Holy Communion both as Bridegroom and as Lamb of God, to embrace your soul, and He desires you thus to welcome Him and embrace Him.

The Royal Prophet seems to have had a glimpse of these ineffable divine realities, when in Ps. ii, 12, of the Hebrew text, he thus speaks: *Kiss the son, lest at any time the Lord be angry, and you perish from the just way.* These words have a close proximity of meaning with those of Our Lord Himself, Who said: *Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you* (John vi, 54).

The Holy Eucharist is one of the seven Sacraments and the greatest of them, since it is Our Lord's very Person; but it would be a mistake to think that the other Sacraments, in their manifold graces, have any other object in view than that of making us one with Jesus Crucified. Grace, under all its forms, has for its primary object to make Christians conformable to Jesus Crucified, and one with Him, to make of him *a new creature* in Jesus Crucified. Such is, as proclaimed emphatically by St. Paul, the primary object of all the economy of grace through the sacramental system. *Know you not,* he says to the Romans, *that all we who are baptized in Christ Jesus, are baptized in His death? Our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of*

sin may be destroyed (Rom. vi, 3, 6), and to the Ephesians: *Now, in Christ Jesus, you who sometime were afar off, are made near by the blood of Christ* (Eph. ii, 13). And St. Peter: *Being partakers of the sufferings of Christ, that when His glory shall be revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy* (1 Pet. iv, 13). *He loved me,* says again St. Paul, *and delivered Himself for me* (Gal. ii, 20); and every Christian can say the same with as much fulness, and exclusiveness, and actuality of meaning.

It is true, therefore, that through the Sacraments the mystery of Jesus and Him Crucified, enters into the very making of the Christian, and is the whole pervading element, as all the great Doctors of the Middle Ages, St. Anselm, Hugo of St. Victor, the Master of Sentences, St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas, and Duns Scotus have been at pains to show very explicitly and luminously. And these were but the echoes of all the Fathers of the Church who had gone before.

CHAPTER XIV

IMPORTANT CONSEQUENCES OF THIS DOCTRINE OF THE VERBUM CRUCIS

VERY important consequences follow from this doctrine. The history of the Church and the lives of the Saints show that from time to time there have appeared chosen souls which have received from Our Lord a public mission of special atonement and of vivid representation of His Passion, by miraculous infliction of sufferings and miraculous exterior phenomena, such as the sacred stigmata, wonderful sheddings of blood, etc. To such only does the narrow school of theologians of which we spoke in Chapter I reserve the name of mystics. Now it seems to me, in view of all that we have just stated, that these theologians err grievously.

The true mystical life of the saints does not consist in these exterior phenomena, which may even not come from God, which are at best but extraordinary manifestations of a life of union with our Lord, lying far deeper, where the eye of man cannot fathom. *All the glory of the King's daughter is within* (Ps. xliv, 14). Mystical life is precisely that hidden, deep,

secret intercourse between the holy soul and her Beloved in the sanctuary of the soul, where the Sacraments do their work, where there is no room for deception. Mystics are those who lead this interior life, whether they be favoured or not with miraculous manifestations.

The contention of the narrow school of mystics is very mischievous. First it has a tendency to make us lose sight of the fact that all Christians without exception, in all walks of life and in all situations, and in all the details of their daily lives and sufferings, are expected to identify themselves with *Jesus Christ and Him Crucified* (1 Cor. ii, 2), and that they are able so to do by faith and the use of the Sacraments. Then it has also a tendency to persuade some silly persons that they are not in actual union with Jesus Crucified unless they do something extraordinary, or unless something miraculous happens to them; which persuasion, as will be readily understood, opens wide the door to all sorts of extravagant desires and spiritual delusions, some of which have come under my own personal observation more than once.

There is yet another consequence to draw from our doctrine of the "VERBUM CRUCIS." It is that, in his turn, the non-mystic, the tepid and negligent Christian also errs grievously, when he looks upon the death of Our Lord simply as an event which took place nineteen centuries ago, and in which he had no part, except to be somehow benefited by it; a mighty event, to be sure, but still, for all that, nothing more than a fact of ancient history, with which

his personal connection is very remote indeed.

In the eyes of the fervent Christian, on the contrary, in the eyes of the mystic, the death of Our Lord is a never ending reality and actuality, a sacrifice which began on Calvary, which has not ceased, but goes on through time and space, on earth on our Altars, and at the same time on the Altar of Heaven, gathering everything unto itself; and the mystic feels himself caught up in it, and a part of it, now and for ever.

Again, for the non-mystic, perpetual union in life and death with Jesus Crucified is considered as a sort of luxury of the Christian life, a pious excess to which all are not called, whilst in the eyes of the mystic, union and identification with Jesus and Him Crucified is simply the essential condition of being a Christian at all.

A last remark which may help us to realize the mighty scope of the "Verbum crucis" is this. Sinners themselves, in the very act of sinning fall (alas! to their own misfortune), under the spell of the mystery of the Cross as of an event actually taking place, and in which they have a distinct, personal undeniable share: *Crucifying again to themselves the Son of God, and making a mockery of Him* (Heb. vi, 6). *Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord* (1 Cor. xi, 27). *A man making void the law of Moses, dieth without any mercy, under two or three witnesses. how much more do you think he deserveth worse punishments, who hath*

trodden under foot the Son of God and hath esteemed the blood of the Testament unclean, by which he was sanctified? (Heb. x, 28-29).

Let us conclude this very important chapter with the affirmation of St. Paul: *Verbum crucis his qui salvi fiunt est virtus Dei*, i.e.: the word of the cross . . . to them who are saved is the power of God (1 Cor. i, 18); that is to say, whosoever shall be saved shall be saved through the virtue of God which is hidden in the mystery of the Cross. In other words, the second Person of the most Holy Trinity, our Heavenly Bridegroom, acts upon us for the ends of the mystical life, through His Sacred Humanity, immolated on the Cross, and He does it through the instrumentality of the Sacraments. The virtue by which we are saved is that of the Son of God; the joint instrument ("instrumentum conjunctum")* through which we are saved, is His Sacred Humanity; and He makes use also of separate instruments, as the hand of the workman makes use of tools; these are the Sacraments. And the result is the making of the mystic into the likeness of Jesus and of Him crucified: to Whom be glory and love for evermore!

* *Summa Theologica*, iiia q. 13, a 2.

CHAPTER XV

THAT THE HOLY GHOST IS THE "FIRST GIFT" OF GOD TO THE SOUL

Si scires donum Dei. If thou didst know the gift of God (John iv, 10).

IN this chapter we proceed to state the distinctive part played by the Third Person in our mystical life. As a matter of fact, the Holy Ghost is the one of the three Divine Persons with Whom we have most to do in our present condition.

From the moment of our Baptism, provided we commit no mortal sin, the Holy Ghost is in us all the time, day and night, without so much as a single moment's interruption of His presence. He it is by whose operation we are to be changed into a Divine being: so that the whole secret of the spiritual life consists in allowing the Holy Ghost to do in us and with us what He wills. He is, moreover, the Divine Person Whom we may and ought to enjoy most during our pilgrim state, whilst we enjoy the other two Persons only through Him.

God the Father, Who is the Prime-mover of our mystical life, as we have seen in Chapter VIII, acts upon us not directly and by Himself,

but through His Divine Son whom He sent on earth for this very purpose. In His turn, Our Lord, the Son of God made man, acts upon us in two ways: first by Himself; secondly, by His Holy Spirit. He acts upon us directly, by Himself, through the instrumentality of His Sacred Humanity, under the veil of the Sacraments, as we have seen in the two preceding chapters; and He acts upon us also, and indeed much more, indirectly, through His Holy Spirit. In fact, this is even the very first way, in order of time, in which God the Father and God the Son do act upon any one they want to draw to the Divine union: they act upon him by the agency of the Holy Spirit, they first of all give him their Holy Spirit. This is what makes St. Thomas say that the Holy Ghost is the first gift, "Primum Donum."

God first loved us, and then created us.

God first loved the world, and then He gave it His only Son.

God first sent out His Holy Spirit upon the turbid elements of what was to be the world, and then He sent out His Word, His *Fiat*, to organize it into the beautiful Cosmos.

In the first explicit revelation of the most Holy Trinity, when the Angel Gabriel announced unto Mary that she would be the Mother of the Redeemer, the Holy Ghost is first mentioned: His being infused into Mary is the first Divine fact, paving the way, so to say, for the coming of the Son of God. He was the first gift to Mary.

And so it is likewise, not only in the mystery

of the Incarnation proper, but also in the extension of the Incarnation, that is to say, in the mystery of the Church, and in the mystery of the union with Christ, of every individual soul.

The Holy Ghost is the first gift we receive, perfectly gratuitous, without any previous merit on our part; so really a gift, that He is never to be recalled or taken away from us, but to be ours throughout all time and all eternity.

It is through His indwelling in us that we enter upon the supernatural life, and that we shall do the supernatural acts it calls for. *If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit* (Gal. v, 25). We live in the Spirit when we are in the state of grace; we walk in the Spirit when attending to the demands of the Holy Ghost for the purposes of the mystical life. It is through His operation that we are united to Jesus Christ in His mystical body of the Church. We are first baptized in water and the Holy Ghost, and, then only, are we admitted to the other Sacraments, and especially to the partaking of the Flesh and Blood of the Saviour in Holy Communion.

In the fourth book of Kings (Chap. iv) we read of the great miracle of the oil wrought in favour of the poor widow of Sarepta. In the spiritual sense this was a prophecy of the coming of the Holy Ghost into our souls. The poor widow represents Holy Church on earth, widowed of her husband, Our Lord. The vessels are our very bodies and souls; the oil is the outpouring of the Holy Ghost Himself, this "*oil of gladness*" which wells up from the very heart of

God the Father and of God the Son, and desires to diffuse itself and fill our vessels to overflowing. Now, this pouring out of the Holy Ghost in us, this extension of the great event of Pentecost, is not done with great noise as of a whirlwind and with visible tongues as it were of fire, but all silently, secretly, and yet as powerfully and efficaciously, if only the Holy Ghost finds clean and empty vessels, quite free from self-love and the disorderly affections of creatures.

Then, indeed, will He fulfil His office of Paraclete or Consoler. The Holy Ghost is the very gladness of God, the very joy of God, the mutual, eternal, infinite Love of God the Father and of God the Son. How could such a Person, such a Gift, such a Guest not bring gladness to the fervent soul who sets herself to enjoy Him? He teaches the soul "*all things*" she ought to care for: the ways of purity, simplicity, goodwill to all, solid and cheerful piety, the *beautiful ways* of God (Prov. iii, 17). And He fills her with deep, secret consolations.

When you experience joy in your Christian life, in the full adhesion of your mind to the truths of faith, and in their contemplation; in prayer and the receiving of the Sacraments; in the practice of the Commandments and of the evangelical Counsels according to your state in life, it is the gladness of the Holy Ghost making itself felt; the very essence of mystical life is being imparted to you. But if, on the contrary, the performance of your Christian or religious duties affords you no joy; if you have no relish

for them; if you find them irksome and tedious, it may be that the Holy Ghost has not found the vessel of your heart clean and empty, and His sweetness cannot take effect in you until disorderly affections have been all thrown out and washed away from the heart.

Finally, let us consider for a moment the case of the Christian in mortal sin.

When, after the Holy Ghost has been given to a man He ceases, on account of mortal sin, to be in that man, it is not that God has withdrawn His Gift, *the gifts of God are without repentance*. What has happened is this: the man has made himself unfit for the further indwelling of the Holy Spirit. When the light of day is streaming through the windows into a room and filling it with brightness and warmth, if you close all the shutters tightly, there will be darkness in that room. Is it that the sun has withdrawn its rays? The sun has withdrawn nothing: its rays are still besieging this room and shedding their kindly light and warmth all around it. As soon as the shutters are thrown open, the light will flood the room again. It is even thus with the Holy Ghost who is sent to illumine and to inflame our souls.

CHAPTER XVI

THE HOLY GHOST, THE SECRET DIRECTOR OF THE MYSTIC

Si Spiritu vivimus, Spiritu et ambulemus. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit (Gal. v, 25).

THE Holy Ghost, this first gift of God, bestowed upon the Christian by the united action of God the Father and of God the Son at the moment of His baptism, constitutes the dowry of the soul, the dowry of our divine marriage with the Son of God.

A dowry assigned to a young maiden constitutes her fortune. It enriches her, it may serve to make her more desirable in marriage. It may serve also to set off her beauty, enabling her to deck herself with diamonds and precious pearls, and costly stuffs of marvellous texture; but for all that it remains a dead thing. Not so our dowry, the Holy Ghost. It does indeed enrich us; it does indeed deck us with costly gifts and sets off the beauty of our soul, or rather gives it its beauty, for without Him we have none; but moreover It is alive, It is a Person, a Divine Person; It acts; It acts divinely. It is God, the breath of God, the flame of the life of God, the substantial love of God, an infinite Person. Such is our dowry. We can well

understand that it should make us instinct with Divine life, breathing spiritually the fire of the love of God, crying out to the Father with the feelings of true children, and yearning with unutterable groanings after our heavenly Bridegroom. The Holy Ghost sets the mystic all on fire with the love of God, makes him act in the way that will please Him, prepares his body and soul for the chaste, fiery embrace of Jesus in Holy Communion, and prepares him from afar for the ardently longed-for consummation of his nuptials in the Beatific Vision.

All these things the Holy Ghost works in us by the two operations of the Mystical Life, Divine Contemplation and Saintly Action, in the manner that we shall describe later on, at greater length in special treatises. Suffice it for the present to note that it is the Holy Ghost who produces in us sanctifying grace, and with it the infused virtues, both Theological and Moral; also actual graces; and finally that magnificent cluster of special graces which are called the Seven Gifts and the Twelve Fruits and the Beatitudes.

It is the Holy Ghost Who produces heroic virtue wherever it is found; the heroic constancy of the martyrs in the midst of the most appalling torments, the heroic self-inflicted expiation of Penitents, the heroic abnegation of true Christians under all circumstances, especially in the discharge of the varied duties of their state of life, whatever that happens to be, whether conjugal or celibate, in the cloister, or in the world.

The Holy Ghost is the secret Director of the mystic.

The whole art of the spiritual life consists in attending to the Holy Ghost within us; in our becoming docile to His lights and responsive to His motions.

The spiritual father must, so to say, take his cue from the Holy Ghost, in his direction of each individual soul. Priests and Superiors of religious are not to direct those in their care, arbitrarily or at random, or again by uniform inflexible rules, but according as they read the signs of the peculiar dealings of God with each one separately.

Hence it is necessary that he who wants to be directed properly should be very simple and open and sincere, and should give a candid account of his own interior lights and motions. Particularly is this the case where there is a special attraction. I call by this name a steady inspiration or motion of the Holy Ghost to some particular virtue or form of life, which it is therefore very important first to discern; secondly, to follow up faithfully.

We do not, as a rule, pay enough attention to the real presence of the Holy Ghost in us, to that kingly, Divine Guest, who silently came to take up His abode in our soul, and anointed our very body as His temple, and Who, if we only let Him, will take in hand the government of our spiritual life.

If we only let Him: that is to say, if we do not take the government of ourselves out of His hands and give it to some of His rivals.

What rivals? Any of the following: first, our own personal, narrow, ungenerous spirit; then the spirit of the old Adam and corrupt nature in us; then the spirit of the world, finally the evil spirits or fallen Angels that tempt us. The proper discernment of these spirits and of their motions in the soul is a most important branch of the spiritual art, as we shall see in another volume.

How easy, then, ought to be mystical life, when the very Operator of it is in us, at our beck and call, so to say, and is burning to work it out in us! The Holy Ghost at His very first coming into a soul by Baptism infuses into it all virtues. It is a fact that all virtues are in every Christian in the state of grace. They are there, though perhaps unknown, uncared for, ineffectual, inoperative. They are in the infant child dormant, as the seed just dropped by the sower and covered by the sod. They are in *Beginners* only as germs which may or may not develop, according to the nature of the soil and to the care which they may receive; according at the same time, to the rain and the sunshine of the actual graces which God will not fail to shower upon the soul. They are in the *Advanced* as blooming flowers, giving out great delight to the beholder, and sweet perfumes and good promise of a rich harvest. They are in the *Perfect* as full and matured fruit, delightful to look at and sweet to the taste. All these virtues, the same Spirit worketh out in us, according as we leave Him free to act within us.

The Holy Ghost, then, is God making Him-

self an object of ineffable enjoyment to the fervent Christian in the secret of his heart. He is the hidden sweetness of all our supernatural life. He is the link which binds us to Jesus Christ, even as He is the bond of union between the Father and the Son. He is the substantial unction that consecrates us children of God; the divine oil that insinuates itself into all the cogs and wheels of our supernatural being to make them work readily and smoothly. He is the well-spring of the eternal joy of God the Father and of God the Son, poured out upon and into our very souls. He is the perfume of sweet odour which makes us verily objects of delight to the most Holy Trinity.

In the tepid, negligent soul, the Holy Ghost is treated with great indignity, not as an honoured guest, but rather as a prisoner, He is fettered and gagged, with all the springs of His divine energies in the soul stayed and obstructed.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PART OF THE CHURCH IN OUR MYSTICAL LIFE

THE Holy Ghost acts upon us for the ends of mystical life, not only internally, by His intimate presence in the soul, as we have seen in the foregoing chapter, but also externally, that is, from the outside, by means of an instrument, which is the Church.

It must not be supposed, when we say that the Holy Ghost is the secret Director of the mystic, that we fall into that individualism in Religion which is the bane of Protestantism. Highly personal and strictly private and exclusive as are the mystic's relations with God in the secret of his heart, they cannot be said to savour of individualism, because they in no way withdraw him from his necessary relations with the whole mystical body of Christ, which is the Church; nay, they render him most submissive to her teaching and her government.

The mystic knows that the Church is the chosen organ of that same Holy Ghost who secretly moves him, and who can in no way contradict Himself. He knows that if any interior inspiration of his were in contradiction with the teaching of the Church, such an inspiration would thereby stand convicted of

emanating not from the Holy Spirit, but from quite another sort of spirit. The Church is set up by Almighty God to act as a check and as a sort of controlling authority upon the mystic. The true mystic's reliance upon interior experience is never such as to make him prefer his own judgment to that of the Church.

It is worthy of remark that the father and founder of the science of Mystical Theology, Dionysius called the Areopagite, is not only the author of the first treatise on the matter, but also of the treatises: *De Cœlesti Hierarchia*, and *De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia* (treatises small in bulk yet weighty in matter), thus demonstrating that the more one is a mystic so much the keener is one's perception of the golden links which bind us to the unseen world of grace and glory. He shows that, through the grand Hierarch and Head of the Church, Christ, the mystic lives in a conscious, vital union with the whole Church of the past and of the present, visible and invisible, militant, suffering and triumphant, of men on earth, of separate souls in Purgatory and in Heaven, of the blessed angelical natures, and of the three Divine Persons. Can a more opulent, magnificent life for a wayfarer be dreamt of?

Holy Church is the Mistress of mystical life. To her it is given to invite all men thereto by the preaching of the Gospel, and to initiate all men of good will into it by the administration of the Sacraments. The mystic, wherever he finds himself in the world, and upon whatever rung of the social ladder, is well cared and

catered for by Holy Church. The whole Hierarchy of the Church and her oral and written teaching, the treasure of her Sacraments and Sacramentals, with the Holy Sacrifice, and the whole order of the liturgical service the year round are for him. He has a father in the person of the Pope, the Vicar of Christ, and another father in the person of his Bishop, and yet another father, nearer to him, in the person of his parish Priest, and he knows that all these diverse spiritual paternities merge themselves into the universal paternity of Jesus Christ, "who," says Abbot Vonier, "is the true inwardness of the Church."*

In fulfilment of her office as mistress of the mystical life, the Church has promulgated, from time to time as occasion offered, and as heresy compelled, a long series of illuminating condemnations of false propositions bearing on the subject of the mystical life, and she has put upon the Index a host of dangerous works on the same subject, from the pens of deluded teachers.

At the same time as he sees in the Church the authorized organ of the Holy Ghost, the mystic sees also in her the fulness of Christ, the *Wife of the Lamb* (Apoc. xxi, 9) in whom He takes His delights, in whom He still lives on earth, and continues His work of saving souls to the end of time: a revelation of Him, especially in the lives of her saints and in her works of mercy, spiritual and temporal. To the mystic, the Church is the City of God on

* *The Personality of Christ*, Ch. xxxiii.

earth, and he the citizen; she is the kingdom of God on earth, and he a loyal subject; she is the mystical body of which Christ is the Head and he a living member. The mystic is constantly receiving from the Church, and also constantly giving to the Church, as the ripening bunch of grapes is both constantly receiving from the vine, and adding to it.

The part which devolves upon the Church in the formation of the mystic is that of a true mother. The mystic is born of the marriage of the Son of God with Holy Church: he is the child of both parents. Could he ever forget that she is his mother and the Bride of Christ?

It is in this relation of our vital union with the mystical body of Christ, the Church, and of the external action of the Holy Ghost upon us through the Church, that we must view the part played by our guardian angel in our spiritual life.

Our guardian angel is the personal embodiment of the Providence of God towards us individually. He is the guardian both of our natural and of our supernatural life. To him it belongs, from the moment of our conception in the womb to our last breath upon earth, to foresee and turn aside the many dangers that invisibly beset us on all sides, and which might prevent us from attaining the end of our creation. Theologians tell us that for this purpose God communicates to our guardian angel a large share of His own special love for us, together with a marvellous knowledge of the soul he has to guard, and the power to influence it

for good, possessed by no other spirit; without, however, lessening either our own liberty or our responsibility. We shall never know till we are in the land of the spirits, how far this action of our guardian angel upon us and upon the external world in our behalf has extended itself; or how many times his intervention has saved us from material harm, due to the relentless working of the laws of nature, so imperfectly known to us, or to the malice of the evil spirits.

This is but one side, the less lofty, of the guardian angel's ministration. He is, moreover, in a certain way, a real partner in the great undertaking of our spiritual life. He is linked to his charge, and his charge is linked to him in a bond of spiritual relationship in such a way that, after the present life, they will stand towards one another in heaven and throughout all eternity in a mutual relationship of love quite apart. At present, and for the purposes of mystical life, this close and active relationship of ours with a particular member of the celestial Hierarchy is intended by Almighty God to be productive of much good to us: it is for us therefore to be alive to this marvellous supernatural fact; for, then, we shall not fail to turn often to our guardian angel, doing him honour, calling him frequently to help us, and being careful not to make opposition to him through ignorance, stupidity, or tepidity.

What an entrancing thought this, that one of the princes of heaven has charge of me; that he is my own, my very own guardian and brother, to whom I am expected to look for help at any

time, and who forestalls my needs, and employs himself in a thousand ways in my service. But that is not all. The very fact of this active relationship and ministration of a guardian angel to each one of us brings home to us in a vivid manner how closely related we are to the whole world of glory, to the Church Triumphant. And so it is that in Christ the mystic finds no difficulty in fraternizing with all the blessed Angels, and the dear Saints who are already in heaven, giving them the meed of praise and admiration which is their due, asking the help of their intercession, and animating himself by their example to a more fervent service of God; rejoicing in their triumph, their glory, their security, their bliss; in which he sees a sure token of what is soon to be his also. Thus we see that in giving himself to loving intercourse with God alone in the secret of his heart, the mystic is far from isolating himself. He does not keep aloof from his brethren, either those on earth, or those who are in glory; he does not claim an exemption from the control and action of the Church; on the contrary, he is all the more united to her and to his brethren, inasmuch as he is more closely united to God.

CHAPTER XVIII

MAN, HIMSELF, THE REAL MASTER OF THE WORK

THE master of the work in the mystical life, strange though it may appear at first sight, is not God, but man.

The person really at the head of it all, the one finally responsible, is each individual man.

True, nothing can be done without God. The raising of man above himself to a share of the Divine nature cannot be done but by God Himself; and we have seen in the foregoing chapters how indeed each one of the three Divine Persons contributes to this work and employs Himself about it. But the fact is that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost are in this work (I say it in all reverence), nothing more than fellow-workers with man. They start the work because it cannot be started by him; and then wait upon his good pleasure to press it forward and bring it to completion. The three Divine Persons are in collaboration with the Christian in his efforts to become a saint, but they leave to him, if not the principal, at least the decisive action, the casting vote, so to say.

If we were to view things with the eyes of a philosopher we could divide all beings roughly

into two classes; first, this supernatural being, God, in the Trinity of His Persons and the fulness of His mysteries; secondly, the universality of things created, all and each in their own peculiar nature. But we are not only philosophers, we are also Christians, and we know that, through grace the angels first, and then man, at the very moment of their creation, have been lifted out of the low plane of nature and transferred into the sphere of the Divine.

To say nothing more of the angel at present; man, natural man, through the instrumentality of grace, is raised above himself and all earthly things, and transformed into a being of quite another kind. He is transfigured into a Divine being. He is made, in Jesus Christ, partaker of the Divine nature. Body and soul, the whole man, is mysteriously, mystically, united to the Sacred Humanity of Jesus, *as the branch to the vine* (John xv), and thus he receives the influx of the Divine life. It is hereby that he is made capable of the indwelling of the three Divine Persons Who, as a matter of fact, *make their abode with him* (John xiv, 23). Then is he truly a new being, "*nova creatura*," very different from the purely natural man, incomparably more exalted, nobler, richer; for he is endowed with new faculties which make him capable of eliciting divine acts—acts namely of faith, hope, charity, and of the infused moral virtues.

Previously, or by virtue of his purely natural state, man was capable of holding his own place among the bodies of this visible universe, sub-

ject to the natural laws which govern them. He was capable, moreover, of feeding and growing and multiplying in the same way in common with the members of the vegetable kingdom; and he was also capable, in a higher degree of excellence than the beasts, of attending to the acts of relation with the exterior world, by means of the senses and of the faculty of local motion. Finally, he was capable, by means of his natural intellect, of discovering the universal under the particular, of comparing ideas and of drawing conclusions; and by means of his free will, of shaping his course of action as he pleased in all the details of his private and domestic and social life, within the limits of the purely natural order of things. All this, but nothing more. Even the most noble among the natural faculties of man, I mean, his intellect and his free will, though they place him at the head of the material universe of things, do not lift him up above the plane of nature.

But, with grace intervening, the same man finds himself impregnated through and through with a marvellous new element, the Divine life; and, as a consequence, he becomes capable of eliciting Divine acts. He is lifted above nature and made wholly Divine and transferred to the family of God, to the society of the three Divine Persons. The very substance of his soul and even of his body, with their faculties high and low, are filled, invisibly to the eye of sense, with the glory of the Divine Essence, informed by it, coloured and made resplendent with it. As a coloured glass in a cathedral window when

a flood of light passes through it; as a sponge in mid-ocean filled with salt water; as a roll of cotton-wool dipped in balm; as a piece of iron in a blazing furnace; as a light cloud in the splendour of the setting sun; even so is natural man transfigured and transformed by the grace of God into a new being.

He is raised to the Divine knowledge, to the Divine sanctity and even, in part at least, and alas! with frequent painful eclipses, to the Divine joy. His mind is rendered capable of apprehending somehow the very mysteries of God, and of giving his assent to them. He is informed, by Divine revelation, of truths which no created intellect could ever reach by itself; God making Himself his witness. His will, strengthened by the virtue of the Sacraments, is made capable of producing, with a Divine energy, acts corresponding to the revelation made to his mind. It is rendered capable of approving and loving what has been revealed to us of the perfections and works and life of God, and of adjusting his whole human life to these new data.

Thus, the Christian knows that God is a Trinity of Persons in the most absolute unity of essence, and of substance; and though he cannot wholly grasp this fundamental truth, he gives joyful assent thereto and adores unquestioningly.

He knows that God wills his own sanctification and deification, and he wills it also, and proceeds to do all the acts necessary to this end.

He knows what God loves, namely, Himself, and the works of His hands, each in its degree, and he loves also God with his whole heart,

and the things He has made, subordinate to Him and each in its proper rank.

Thus, man's higher faculties, mind and will, are made to have the same object of their activities as God, namely, God Himself. Through grace, God grants to man the power to see somehow by faith, and to will, and to love, and to have a share in what constitutes the very life of God.

It is from the summit of these two higher faculties of man, his intelligence and his free will, that the grace of God enlightens his lower faculties, trains them, forces them to fall into line with the Divine order, and makes them serve, each in its proper place, the ends of supernatural life.

So we may say that grace consists in this: first, in God's proposing Himself as the object of our knowledge and love; secondly, in His rendering our mind and will capable of these supernatural acts; thirdly, in His actually inclining and soliciting us to perform these acts, and thus to attain their supernatural object, namely, Himself, in the Trinity of His Persons. These are Divine operations indeed, not only on the part of God, but on the part of man as well; Divine operations, since they have God directly for object; with this difference, that in God they are subjective and immanent, whilst in man they are necessarily objective and transient, inasmuch as God is distinct from the essence of man and outside it.

God enters into that man in order to cause him not only *to be* divinely but also *to act*

divinely. God fills the Christian with His own Divine presence of love and all His gifts in order that under the Divine impulse and motion man should of himself produce divine fruits, works of edification. Now in proportion as a man lends himself to these divine operations and follows their motions, in the same proportion does he grow in divine life and become divinely fruitful; just as, on the contrary, in proportion as he puts obstacles to the Divine motions and refuses to obey them, in the same proportion does he make himself guilty or very imperfect, and will have to redress such a great wrong and to atone for it either in this life or hereafter in Purgatory, unless (which may God avert!) he happens to be rejected altogether and condemned to hell for having made himself wholly unfit for the supernatural.

All this then is man's doing, man's work. He has always the last word in the matter of his own sanctification. God has placed him in the hands of his own counsel, a rational being with rights and duties and responsibilities that can never be shifted. Each man decides for himself whether he will or will not accept the Divine advances, the Divine motions and directions, the Divine supernatural help we call grace, and impregnate his whole life with it.

This casting vote remains with every man all through life, from the first moment of his intelligent conscious activity to his very last breath. He can at any time reconsider his verdict, shift his position, retrace his steps for good or for evil. He is *sui juris*, and God Himself will not

tamper with his freedom, or touch the spring of his self-determining will. Man is truly the master of the work; man is the maker of his own self for good or evil, for a fervent life or a tepid one, for mystic life or the very reverse; for eternal merit and glory, or for his own damnation. *Perditio tua, Israel,* Thy *destruction is thy own* work, *O Israel,* says the Prophet (Osee xiii, 9). It is for each man to will for himself, and every man does it.

The sooner we understand our exclusive partnership with God, and our paramount, personal responsibility in the affair of our own sanctification, the better. We have perhaps, until now, laid the blame for our not making much headway therein upon this person or that, or upon this or that other outward circumstance. We must cease to do so. We must lay the blame at our own door, and take the full and exclusive responsibility of our life, such as it is.

CHAPTER XIX

MAN A CREATURE IN THE MAKING

DURING our pilgrimage on earth, in our present condition of trial under sin, the supernatural state is as yet attended with many infirmities. It does not receive its full development and perfection, still less its full manifestation. It is true, as says St. John, *we are now the sons of God, and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be* (1 John iii, 2).

We have seen that through the grace of Baptism we enter into the sphere of the supernatural, into the family of God, into the blessed society of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. But the fulness of eternal life that is promised us will begin only after the General Resurrection "*in regeneratione*" when the Son of Man will take His seat on the throne of His Majesty to judge the living and the dead. This will be the grand birthday, not only of the Bride of the Lamb, Holy Church, who will then at last have attained the fulness of her beauty (Apoc. xxi), but it will be the birthday, or, we may say, re-birth-day, that is, the regeneration complete and final, of every individual predestinate from among men.

Till then, man remains in an incomplete state: but it is the swift little drama of our life which decides everything.

Till the day of the Last Judgment man is a future creature, a creature in the making, a beginning of what God intends to do with him, *initium aliquod creaturæ ejus* (Jas. i, 18). He will be a creature completed, only after the resurrection, when all angels and all men that shall ever be, being assembled together in one place, each man will receive in his body and soul at last united, the full meed of glory or shame due to him for his works whilst on earth. Then also will each angel and each man be assigned for all eternity his definitive rank, either in the splendid hierarchy of perfect charity, or in the gloomy hierarchy of confirmed, unreclaimable malice and reprobation.

The purpose of the present life, it will be seen therefore, is to give each man time to make of himself, with the help of God, that exquisite masterpiece, a saint, worthy of the ultimate glory of the heavenly Jerusalem.

Mystical life consists in a man's working thus with God, at his own making, every day of his life.

What a glorious and good thing, then, is mystical life! The more so when we take into consideration what it is God desires man to become, namely, a being so like Himself, so near His own Divine self, so united to His own Divine goodness, that man may at last live in his body and soul the same Divine life with Him, taste the same Divine joy, take part in the same Divine operations; in a word, really be one with God; and this, no longer under the veil of faith and with many restrictions, but in

the perfection of charity and the fulness of the Beatific Vision.

We may go through the diverse degrees of life, beginning with the lowest, and at each we shall be obliged to say: "That is not good enough for man," until we come to the very life of God as it is lived in God. The life of a seed dropped in the ground and buried there until it becomes a blade of grass, or a flower, or a shrub, or a majestic tree: not good enough for man. The life of an insect, of a worm, of a butterfly, of a bee; or that of a bird, a beast in the field or the desert: not good enough for man. The conscious, intelligent, free life of a man as we may picture him to ourselves in a purely natural state or of an angel as God could have created him, in a purely natural state: not good enough for man as God wishes him to become. The life of a Christian, with the light of faith, and the consolation of charity, but (by supposition) without the hope, and eventually the actual granting of the Beatific Vision; or again, the life of a blessed soul enjoying the bliss of heaven all by herself, I mean without the companionship of the body in which she lived and suffered and merited on earth; not yet good enough for man, not yet all that God wished for him. Finally, the life of a blessed being in soul and body after the resurrection, but without connection or association (if it were possible to conceive such a thing) with all the rest of the inhabitants of the heavenly Jerusalem; and without the sharing in the accumulated bliss of all, and imparting to them His own bliss: not good enough for man!

Nothing is good enough for this child of the loving God, short of the immortal, eternal, divine life as it is lived in God with all His blessed ones around Him, short of the very joy that God finds in His own Self and in His saints. Each one of us is to be made, through charity, into a vessel of purest gold, into which the Divine glory will be poured, and will fill it to the very brim. Nay, the golden vessel of a man's soul and body, after the resurrection, is to be immersed in and wholly swallowed up by the Divine glory, so that it will be encompassed by it on all sides, both from within and from without. Not an unconscious vessel, but an animated one, which will know and taste, and enjoy the glory thus poured out into it, and will actively and vitally unite itself to it, even as on earth it actively and vitally made itself worthy of it by its own exertion. Then will the saint throb and palpitate with all the accumulated life of all the other saints as well as with the very life of God.

The purpose of the present life is to give us the time and opportunity of hammering ourselves into shape. No wonder that St. James cries out to us: *My brethren, count it all joy when you shall fall into diverse temptations, knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience, and patience hath a perfect work; that you may be perfect, and entire, deficient in nothing* (Jas. i, 2-4). No wonder that the book of Ecclesiasticus should describe the saint *as a massy vessel of gold, adorned with every precious stone* (Eccli. l, 10).

The great secret of mystical life is that a

Christian should make himself very yielding to the soft and strong pressure of the grace of God within him and thus enlarge his own capacity more and more, that he should try and become, under the mighty hand of God, ever more and more refined and delicately and elaborately chiselled, and should adorn himself with the brightest pearls and most precious stones of virtues and good works. The mystic should always bear in mind that the greater he makes his capacity of loving God whilst on earth, the more has he adorned himself with merit, so much the more will he give glory to His beloved God throughout eternity. Therefore is it that he sets no bounds to his ambition, and refuses to lose one single moment of the precious time of the present life.

CHAPTER XX

ALONE, WITH GOD ALONE

IF we were to try and reckon up the *dramatis personæ* of our own spiritual life from childhood to whatever age we have attained, in the little drama of which we are the centre and the hero, it would seem at first as though there were a very large number of persons concerned.

There are servants of God, some visible, like those around us living in the flesh, our parents, teachers, friends, superiors; others invisible, such as our guardian angel and other pure spirits, and even the saints in heaven, whom at critical junctures we ask to intervene in our behalf, and above all, God and Our Lord Jesus Christ. And, on the other hand, there are also the arch-enemy, the devil, and we do not know how many of his satellites or slaves, some in the flesh, others invisible because pure spirits, though fallen, all eager to tempt us away from the path of duty and to mould our souls, if we let them, to their own image and likeness.

I am the person around whom all these activities centre, I am the stake for which all these adverse forces are aiming. But as it is my privilege (as we have seen in the preceding chapter) to decide finally for myself to which I will adhere and bind myself, we are led to conclude, when

we look closely into the matter, that in reality each man lives his own spiritual life alone with God alone.

Other men around us, and pure spirits, good and evil, as also inferior creatures and inanimate nature; all may and do bring to bear upon us their varied influences, but they are outside us; they stop at the threshold of the soul, and it is left to each man to admit their influences or reject them, to turn their action upon him either to his spiritual advantage or the reverse, and thereby to associate himself with God or to separate himself from Him.

Alone with God alone. Each man supremely solitary in the awful presence of God.

But how natural in a way and how easy does not mystical life appear in the light of this great primary fact! The mystic is he who takes heed of this wondrous state of affairs, and for whom, most naturally, God is all in all. Mystical life is a sort of "*Divina Commedia*" in which all is performed by these two actors God and the faithful loving soul. God plays His part and the soul plays her part. God has engaged in this venture everything that is His; and the mystic, on the other hand, keeps nothing back of all that he may call his own. In this play the more one loses the more one is the gainer: *He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that shall lose his life for My sake shall find it* (Matt. x, 39).

To live alone with God alone consciously and willingly, then, is the ideal. To live with God upon a footing of great intimacy is the very essence and perfection and consummation of the

mystical life. It is a life full of delight and full of pain by turns, because God is pleased to make the loving soul to taste His infinite sweetness; and then again, He scorches her with the flames of His own infinite sanctity; but such a pain is preferable to all the delights of the creatures.

Thus to live with God does not demand an effort of the imaginative faculty. Indeed fancy has nothing to do in the matter. It is simply the sober perception of the grandest reality which could be thought of. God is always with us; though we, on our own part, are not always with Him. God is nearer to me than I am to myself; God is more within me than I am within myself, because God is within me with the fulness of His infinite essence, whilst I am within myself as a created, finite being, held within narrow limits, and moreover diminished by sin; a shadow, an evanescent being, Job says: *Remember that my life is but wind* (vii, 7); and again: *Man born of woman living for a short time is filled with many miseries; who cometh forth like a flower and is destroyed and fleeth as a shadow, and never continueth in the same state* (xiv, 1, 2). But God invites me to unite my puny self to the fulness of His Divine being: yes consciously, joyously, by a free choice constantly renewed, with intensity of love to unite myself to Him. The more I do this the more does God repair the crumbling fabric of my nature, building me up upon and into His own Divine essence; building me up into a being wholly supernatural. And then to the natural presence of God in me is superadded His special presence of love which

constitutes me in the state of grace and into a degree more or less exalted of supernatural life.

It will be asked: Is it really possible to sustain such a life of active relation with God, constantly, without interruption, and not be consumed by the intensity of it?

Well, it is very true that the poor sheath of the body may be quickly burnt out by the flaming soul. This has happened to some: a glorious, quick consummation! Is not such a crowded short life of sanctity and consuming love, such as that of St. Stanislaus Kostka for example, a thousand times better than a long, listless, colourless life of tepidity? *Being made perfect in a short space, he fulfilled a long time* (Wisd. iv, 13). But this is not always the case. There are special graces of strength and endurance meted out to both soul and body, according to the designs of Providence upon each one. St. Teresa lived 67 years; St. Alphonsus Liguori died at the age of 91; St. Anthony, the founder of cœnobitical life in the East, died at the age of 105; and St. Paul, the first Hermit, at the age of 120.

Besides, it is not a question as yet for any of us, so long as we are here below, of living quite the life of the Seraphim in heaven. We walk by faith, in the infirmities of the flesh, surrounded by enemies which we have to fight, and by fellow creatures whom we have to help; which means that, without ever losing hold of God, we have to do a good deal of active, or even mayhap, of apostolic work; now, all this is a providential check on, and tempering of, the consuming intensity of the pure flame of Divine love.

Moreover, to live with God is also to live in spirit with His servants, the blessed angels and the saints of paradise, and actively to keep in touch with them by prayer and loving intercourse: *Our conversation is in heaven* (Philip. iii, 20), says St. Paul. This also is a beautiful provision, which helps one to bear the awful weight of the felt presence of God. Then, again, after having for the sake of the Beloved, renounced all things created, the mystic is led back by the Holy Spirit in the very midst of them, to lay hold of all the creatures animate and inanimate of this visible universe, to make them come with him and through him, into the divine encounter; and this is yet another solace to the intensity of pure thought and consuming love; because in giving free play within healthy limits to the senses and the imagination, it diverts the activities of the soul into different channels, and thus prevents a sort of dangerous congestion in the higher part of our being.

We must also own that, in our present condition, owing to the consequences of original sin, which have not all been abolished, there will always be a somewhat tardy and imperfect correspondence to the motions of God unto supernatural life. As long as this is not deliberate, nor fully consented to, the loving God looks leniently upon our shortcomings, and makes it His business to redress and correct them. *I am the vine,* says Our Lord, *you the branches. My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He will take away, and every one that beareth fruit He will purge*

it, that it may bring forth more fruit (John xv).

Here an important remark finds its place. To live alone with God alone, means a good deal more than to practise the exercise of the presence of God, so much recommended by modern writers of spirituality. To live with God implies a greater intimacy and familiarity. I was always struck, in Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, with the accusation of Catherine of Aragon against Cardinal Wolsey that he would tell untruth even "in the presence," meaning the presence of the King seated on his throne. Nothing can convey a higher idea of the state and ceremony surrounding the person of the King, and making him the image of God on earth, to such an extent that even the telling of an untruth in his presence, apart from the moral turpitude of it, seemed such an absolute want of manners. "In the presence" one ought to hold oneself in an attitude both interior and exterior of deepest respect ruled by decorum and stately formality. But when one lives constantly with the King in the relation of father, or mother, or wife, or child, or of bosom friend, admitted to his privacy, there are times when ceremonies and etiquette are dispensed with, especially when not under the public eye. It is the time for unconventional intercourse, full of sweetness and tenderness, imparting deep joy to one another. Now, to live with God is to entertain such a sort of intercourse with Him. Except in the acts of the sacred liturgy where everything is necessarily set down by rule and strict ceremonial, he who lives with God goes at all times

to Him with perfect directness, simplicity and familiarity. Says Juliana of Norwich in her quaint but impressive language: "God loves a silly soul to be full homely with Him."

It is an art to know how to live with God. One does not get into it all at once, but little by little. One must learn and practise it before one can hope to become proficient in it. But when at last one has become a past master therein, oh! what joy! what security! And what heaps of eternal merit one piles up, the one upon the other: a multi-millionaire's fortune in heaven! And what enlargement of the heart and progress in sublimest charity! and at the same time what unshakable humility! what simplification of one's whole life! What unification of one's whole being! "The one to the One," sang St. Francis of Assisi. "The one to the One!"—a beautiful and significant variation of our motto: "Alone with God alone." Instead of scattering all one's powers at the mercy of passing impressions, one holds them all together and applies them to the single purpose of the life with God.

It will be the object of subsequent volumes now in course of preparation, to sketch out the rules of this noble art in its two divisions of Divine Contemplation and Saintly Action. But before we proceed to their separate treatment we must complete these Preliminaries by casting a glance upon what may be called *the Antithesis of Mystical Life* in its divers degrees. It will help to give us, by contrast, a still more definite and clearer idea of the Mystical life in itself.

THE MYSTICAL LIFE

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